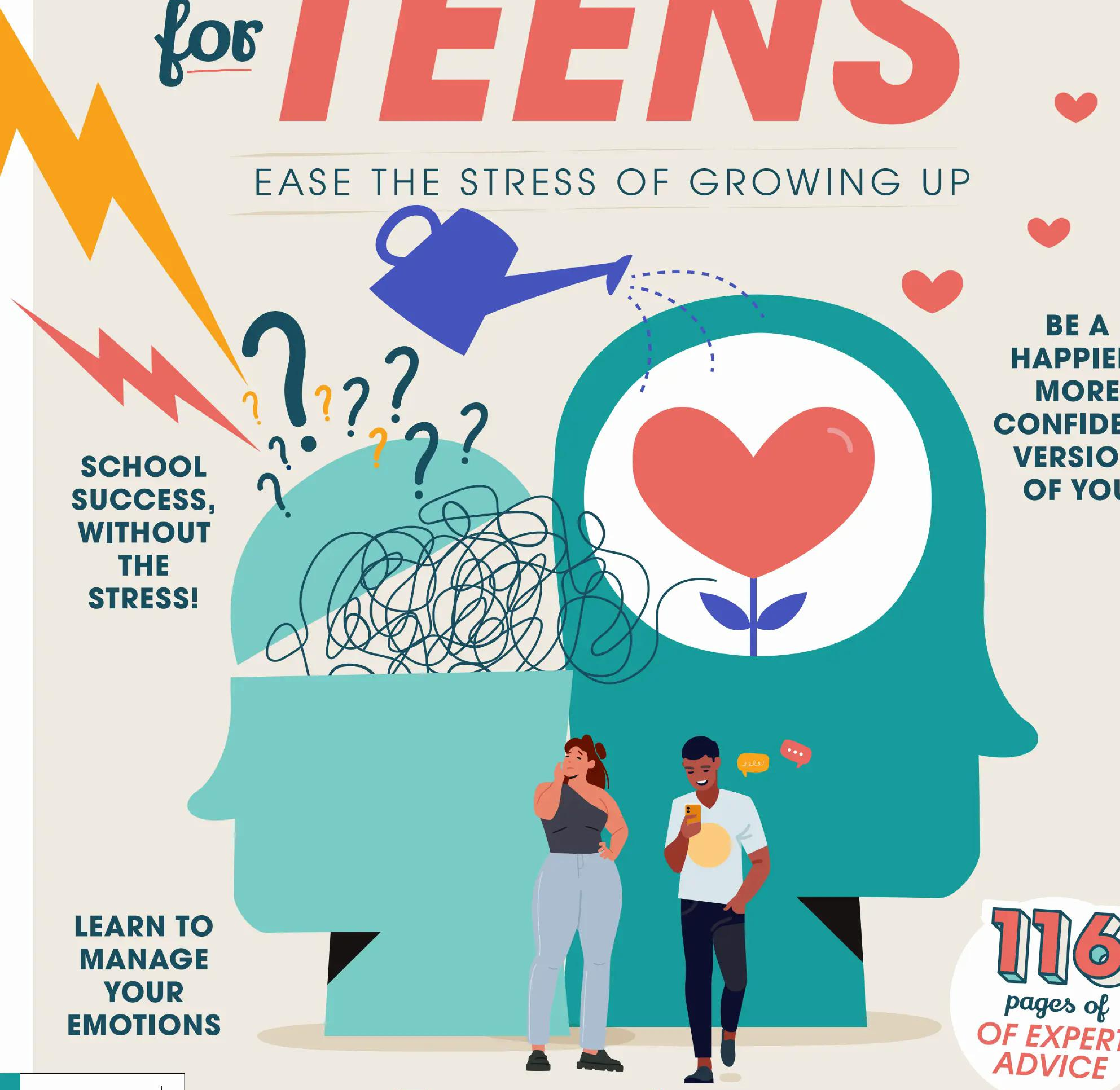
BODY CONFIDENCE + INSOMNIA *New!* + PEER PRESSURE + FUTURE FEAR

Anti-anxiety *for* TEENS

EASE THE STRESS OF GROWING UP



SCHOOL SUCCESS, WITHOUT THE STRESS!

BE A HAPPIER, MORE CONFIDENT VERSION OF YOU

LEARN TO MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS

116 *pages of* OF EXPERT ADVICE

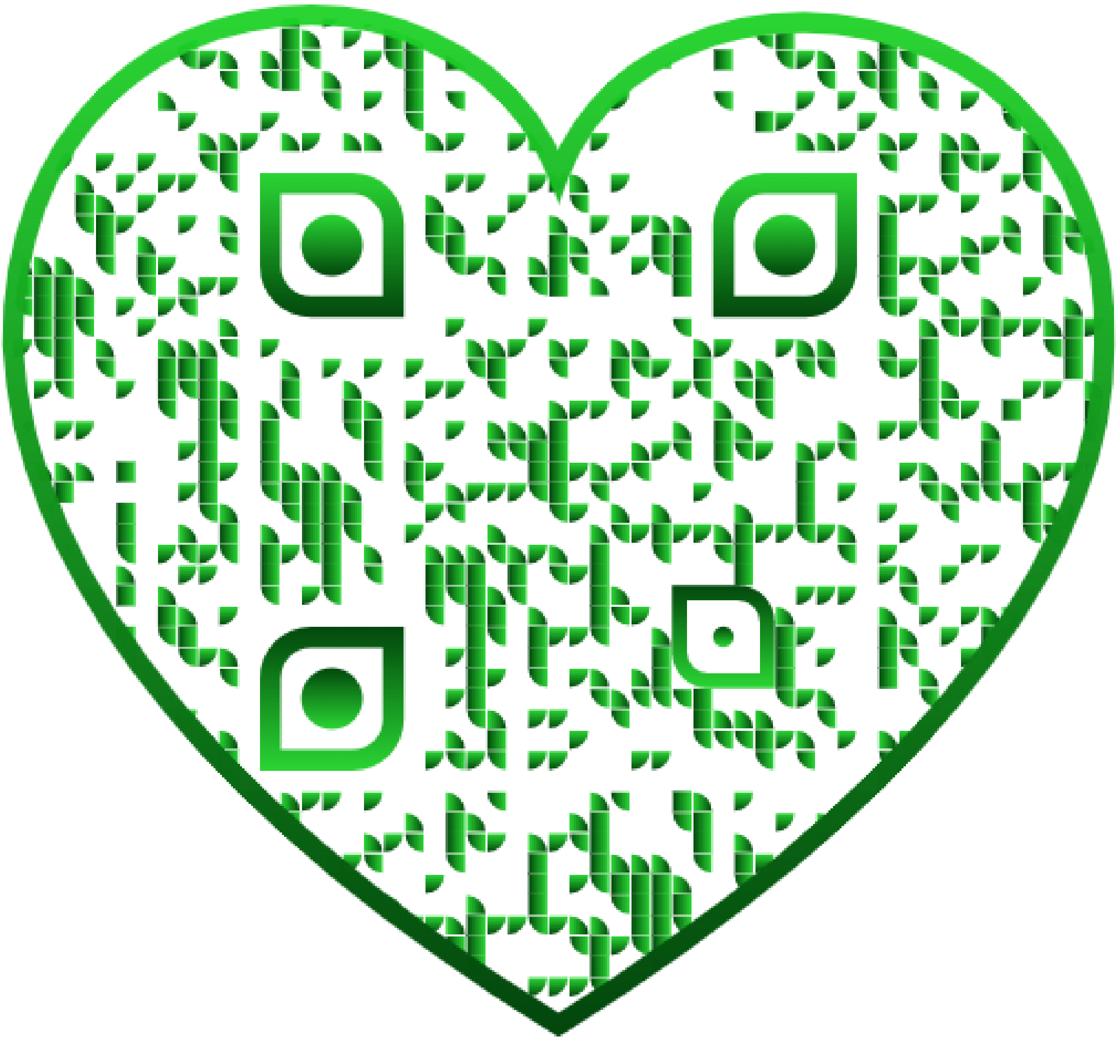
Expand your Social Life

How to fight your fears and make new friends

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SECOND EDITION



Give yourself a break
Respect Yourself
TAKE IT EASY
GOOD VIBES
STRONG Together!

love your MIND

INHALE EXHALE

WELCOME

Being a teenager is hard. From dealing with hormonal and bodily changes that can manifest in some pretty uncomfortable ways to the added stresses of school and an increased independence that can lead to some worrisome social situations – it can all be a little overwhelming. And, while it is totally normal to feel stressed, some of us feel just that little bit more worried than others. So, whether you are an anxious teen yourself, or a parent looking for guidance for a teenager in need, *Anti-Anxiety For Teens* has your back, with tips and advice to help find calm and confidence throughout puberty, adolescence and beyond.

Learn how to face exams without losing your cool, tackle those big life-changing decisions, feel comfortable and secure in your own body, successfully navigate difficult relationships and find your place in the world with confidence. Become equipped with coping techniques, from meditation and grounding exercises to diet and mindfulness, and fight off those fears for a less anxiety-ridden life.

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MY HEAD'S *Exploding!*

Why teenagers can feel like **everything** is running out of control, what they can do about it and how **that's really okay**

You know how you can sometimes feel as if you're different from everyone else? Or that your brain is spinning and you can't stop it? The truth is, teenagers really are different from adults and children. And that brain spinning thing – it really is firing out in all directions. So what you're feeling: that's completely normal. **Here is why...**

WRITTEN BY: EDOARDO ALBERT. IMAGES: GETTY

BRAIN PRUNING & BRAIN GROWING

The number one reason why you feel the way you do is because your brain is, literally, changing. So it's no surprise that you feel different from the people around you, and particularly from adults. Adult brains – and when we say adults, in brain terms this means from the mid- to late twenties and upwards – have largely stopped changing. Adult brains can still learn new things and skills, but they will take longer doing it than teenagers.

This is because the teenage years, from puberty to the mid-twenties, is the second time when the brain rewires itself. There's an absolutely huge burst of brain growth from birth to about seven. This is not surprising – it's when we learn to walk, talk and generally function. That's a lot of things for the brain to learn in a few years. In fact, the brain is wired for certain kinds of learning during childhood, such as learning to speak. But it's a window, not an open book. If a child is raised without hearing people speak – as has sometimes happened when children have been reared by wild animals or in isolation – then they may never learn how to talk. The language learning window closes at around the age of seven.

In those first seven years, the brain is like a jungle. It's growing all over the place. It makes trillions of connections between neurons, your brain cells. Then, it settles down for a few years.

But when you become a teenager, it all starts again. However this time, rather than growing, the brain is mostly pruning. It cuts connections to skills and ideas that you don't use, while at the same time it improves the connections between the ideas, skills and parts of the brain that you do use. The saying, use it or lose it, applies as much to the brain as anything else.

So it's not strange that you should feel odd during these years: your brain is literally rewiring itself.>

> "It's not strange that you should feel odd"

Everything feels more

Why emotions are at their sharpest and strongest for teenagers

Romeo and Juliet were, famously, a pair of teenage lovers. Crushes, rejections, infatuations and true love. They all hit hardest during these years. But it's not just about love. Music means more, stories mean more, everything means more. At this age, people sometimes dedicate themselves to a cause that will fill their whole lives, from Greta Thunberg today to Joan of Arc centuries ago. This is because a part of the brain that produces feelings of pleasure and meaningfulness grows to its maximum size during the teenage years. What's more, the brain also secretes more dopamine, the brain's own pleasure drug, during these years. So everything feels more intense because your brain really is feeling it more intensely. The songs you love, the books you read, the films you watch, will all affect you more deeply during these years than at any other time during your life. So choose them well, for they will leave their mark on your soul.

RISKS & REWARDS

One of the reasons that teens tend to behave differently from adults is that their brain rewiring works at a different pace in different parts of the brain. In particular, the deeper and older parts of the brain, those that produce rewards, develop more quickly than the parts of the brain that deal with self-control, judging consequences and forecasting events. So it's no surprise that teens exhibit more risk-taking behaviour than adults: the parts of the brain that tell them to go for it, it'll be fun, are more developed than the parts of the brain that say, hold on, think this through. While this can lead to accidents – the leading cause of death among teenagers is accidental injury – it can also produce greatness, from Joan of Arc leading the French against the English, to the young Albert Einstein writing the four most important papers in modern physics in 1905, when he was 26, with most of the thinking for these works having taken place when he was younger.

IT'S TOUGH & THAT'S ALL RIGHT

Anxiety is common through the teenage years and, you know what, that's all right. It is difficult. On the physical side, your body is changing, sometimes so fast that you can barely keep up. Some of these changes are potentially embarrassing, from the dramatic changes of pitch as a boy's voice breaks to the onset of periods. What makes these changes more difficult is that they come at a time when we are at our most self-conscious, as well as being most concerned about the reactions of others. Besides, there's no other stage in life where you're as likely to have your party entrance blighted by a bloody great zit sprouting on your nose. That's enough to stress anyone!

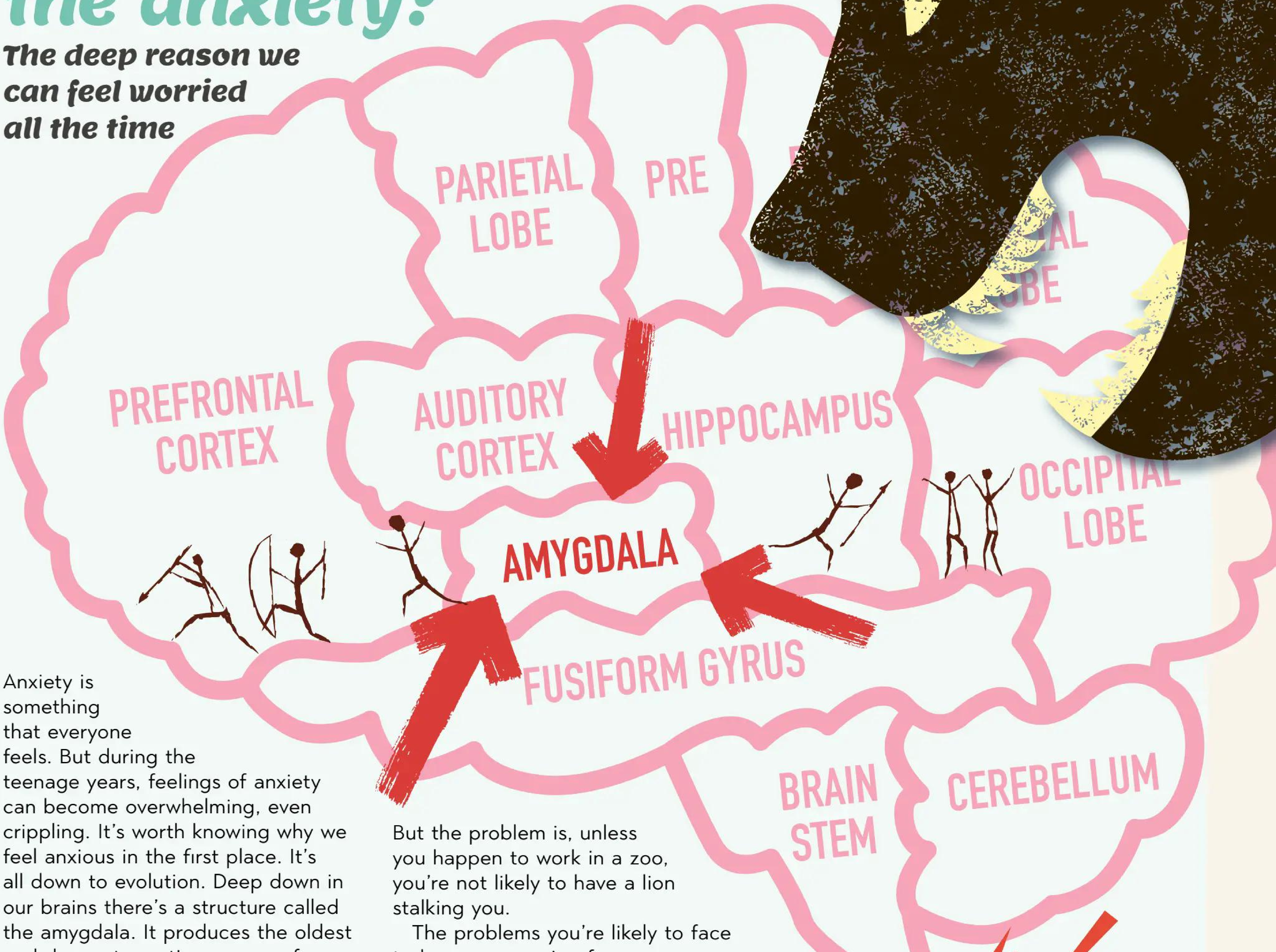
A unique challenge facing today's teens is growing up in the glare of social media. Previous generations could make all sorts of mistakes growing up and there was no one there to record them. Today, thanks to smartphones, everything is recorded, and put on TikTok, Instagram or other social media. The good side: you'll be able to remember all your escapades growing up. The bad side: everyone else will remember all your escapades growing up.

Couple these with the pressures placed on young people during exams (yes, they're important, no, they're not the most important thing ever); the process of discovering who you are and what you are going to do with your life; the search for a purpose; home life, social life, school life; and trying to sort all this without getting enough sleep because your sleep hormones are out of whack, and it's no surprise that there can be days, weeks, or even months when things feel like they're getting too much. This is why taking care of your mental health is important. Adults might seem distant but they went through this: if everything is getting too much, talk to someone you trust or seek professional help. There are chapters in this book about how to do this. >

> "Anxiety is common through the teenage years and that's all right"

What's with all the anxiety?

The deep reason we can feel worried all the time



Anxiety is something that everyone feels. But during the teenage years, feelings of anxiety can become overwhelming, even crippling. It's worth knowing why we feel anxious in the first place. It's all down to evolution. Deep down in our brains there's a structure called the amygdala. It produces the oldest and deepest emotions: anger, fear, anxiety. The amygdala is present in animal brains and it was there in our evolutionary ancestors when they first stepped out on to the African savanna. The savanna was a dangerous place for the first humans. Was the grass moving because of the wind or was a lion stalking closer? If they got it wrong, our ancestors were likely to end up as lunch.

So the brain was wired, at the prospect of danger, to prime the body to react: to fight, to flee or to freeze. To do so, the brain floods the body with hormones so that it is ready for action, in particular, the stress hormone, cortisol. This all worked well on the plains of Africa. But the problem is, unless you happen to work in a zoo, you're not likely to have a lion stalking you.

The problems you're likely to face today are preparing for exams, conflicts with parents and peers, concerns about the future of the world. Unfortunately, none of these have quick solutions. But your brain, trained on the African savanna, doesn't know this. When stressed, it still produces the stress hormone. It still gets the body ready for fight, flight or freezing, as if the danger will quickly be over. But these sorts of dangers don't end with a lion pouncing and you protecting the tribe by chasing it off with a firebrand. Anxiety is the product of long-term stress and it is the commonest mental-health problem in the world, for adults as well as teens.

Teenage worries for the neurodiverse

It's hard enough for the neurotypical, it's harder for the neurodiverse

The teenage years are stressful for everyone. There are good reasons for this. Your brain is changing and your world is changing. But for teenagers who are neurodiverse, these years can be even more stressful. Neurodiversity encompasses conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia and dyspraxia. In essence, the brains of people with these conditions work a little differently from neurotypical people.

Teens with these conditions may also develop anxiety as a trauma response to the expectations placed upon them by a society that doesn't really understand or cater to their unique brain chemistry. For example, teenagers with autism can struggle with social interactions – which becomes much more acute as complicated romantic and sexual feelings come into the picture – while the huge emphasis on exam results puts added pressure on teens with ADHD or dyslexia.

Being different can attract bullying and feelings of being misunderstood, frustration and self-deprecation. Because these conditions, and the people with them, are all so different there is no general solution beyond ensuring you have the time, space and support to deal with the issues growing up brings.

> **"Teenagers with autism can struggle with social interactions"**

HOW SEVERE IS YOUR ANXIETY?

Minimal

Minimal effects of anxiety will have very few physical symptoms, if any at all. You'll have small feelings of worry but will be able to get things done and focus on tasks.

Mild

At this level you may get stomach aches and feel muscle tension. Your sleep and concentration may be affected and you'll feel anxious throughout the day, but not all day.

Moderate

Moderate levels of anxiety might mean that you are anxious for the majority of the day – you might be feeling panicky, tired and getting headaches. It's likely that you'll experience changes in your sleep, appetite and ability to concentrate.

If anxiety is affecting your daily life and stopping you doing normal tasks,

Understanding the severity of your anxiety is the first step to learning how to manage it

Severe

Severe anxiety will mean that you are feeling anxious all day. You might experience shortness of breath, chest tightness or digestive issues. You might feel overwhelmed and want to isolate yourself, as well as be unable to focus on tasks.

Debilitating

Debilitating levels of anxiety will mean that you'll have severe symptoms all day. You won't be able to function and will be experiencing severe physical symptoms. You might be having meltdowns, feel paralysed, and unable to continue.

then it's time to seek help from a medical practitioner

REASONS *to be anxious*

Adolescence is **full of nerve-wracking experiences.** Here are just some of the reasons you might be struggling with anxiety...

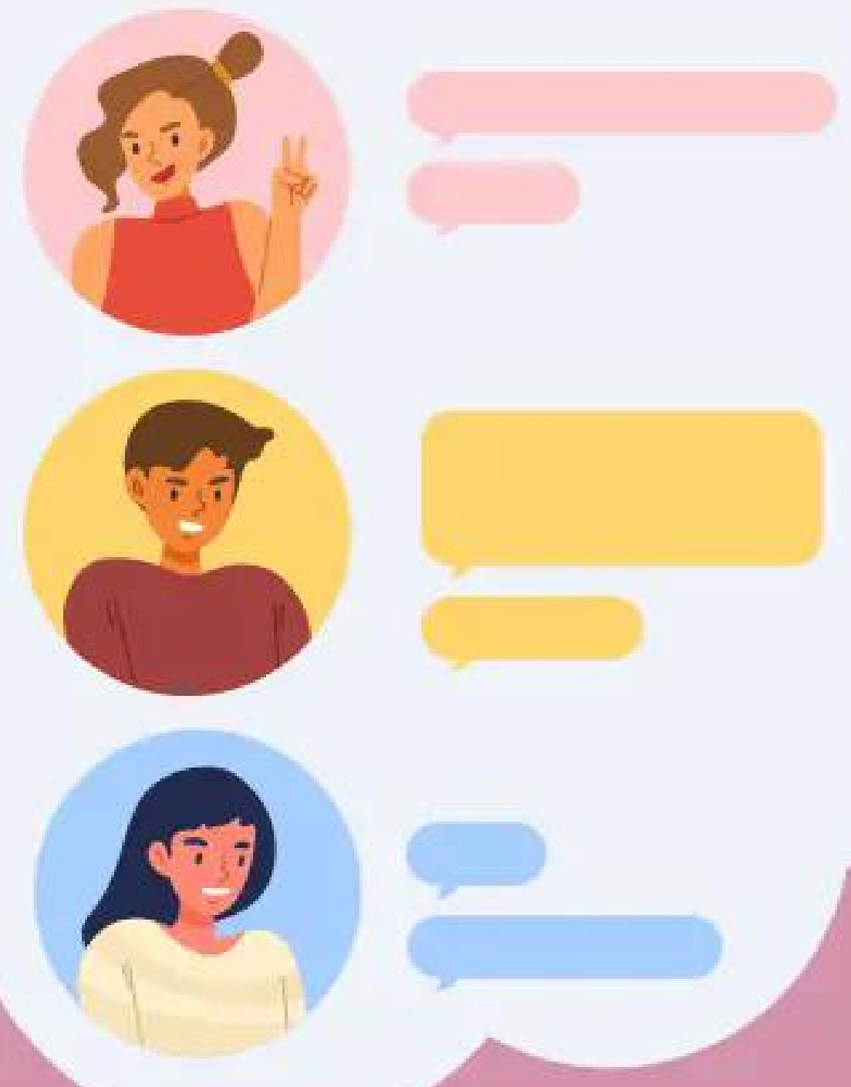
Modern life is stressful. It's perhaps uniquely stressful for teens. Which means that many people are living in a constant low-level state of fight, flight or freeze. As such, it only needs a trigger to set off feelings of anxiety or even a panic attack. So it's an idea to work out what your triggers are and avoid or understand them. Here are some common anxiety triggers.

EXAMS

Teens have to do more exams, more often than anyone else. There's also more pressure to get good exam results than ever before, from schools and parents. Exams are certainly important but they're not the most important thing ever. Your life is not at an end if you don't get the results you want. Many very successful people flunked their exams. It's worth remembering that much of the school pressure results from your school knowing that it will be judged by how well its pupils do. To cope with exam nerves, use stress techniques such as breath control. And remember, in a few years' time, it won't matter what you got in your exams.

PEER PRESSURE

Friends, and what they want and expect, have always been tough for teens. But it's much harder now because phones and social media mean you can't get away from them. The popular girl in your class? She's always showing off her latest things and you can't compete. You don't want to look but you can't help yourself and then you compare your life to hers. But remember: she's only showing you what she wants you to see. No photos of the zit she had to cover with make-up before taking the shot. You can set social media so that you still follow people but they don't dominate your feed. If they're stressing you out, simply silence their presence without alerting them to the fact that you're not seeing every perfect lifestyle photo of theirs.



SOCIAL SITUATIONS

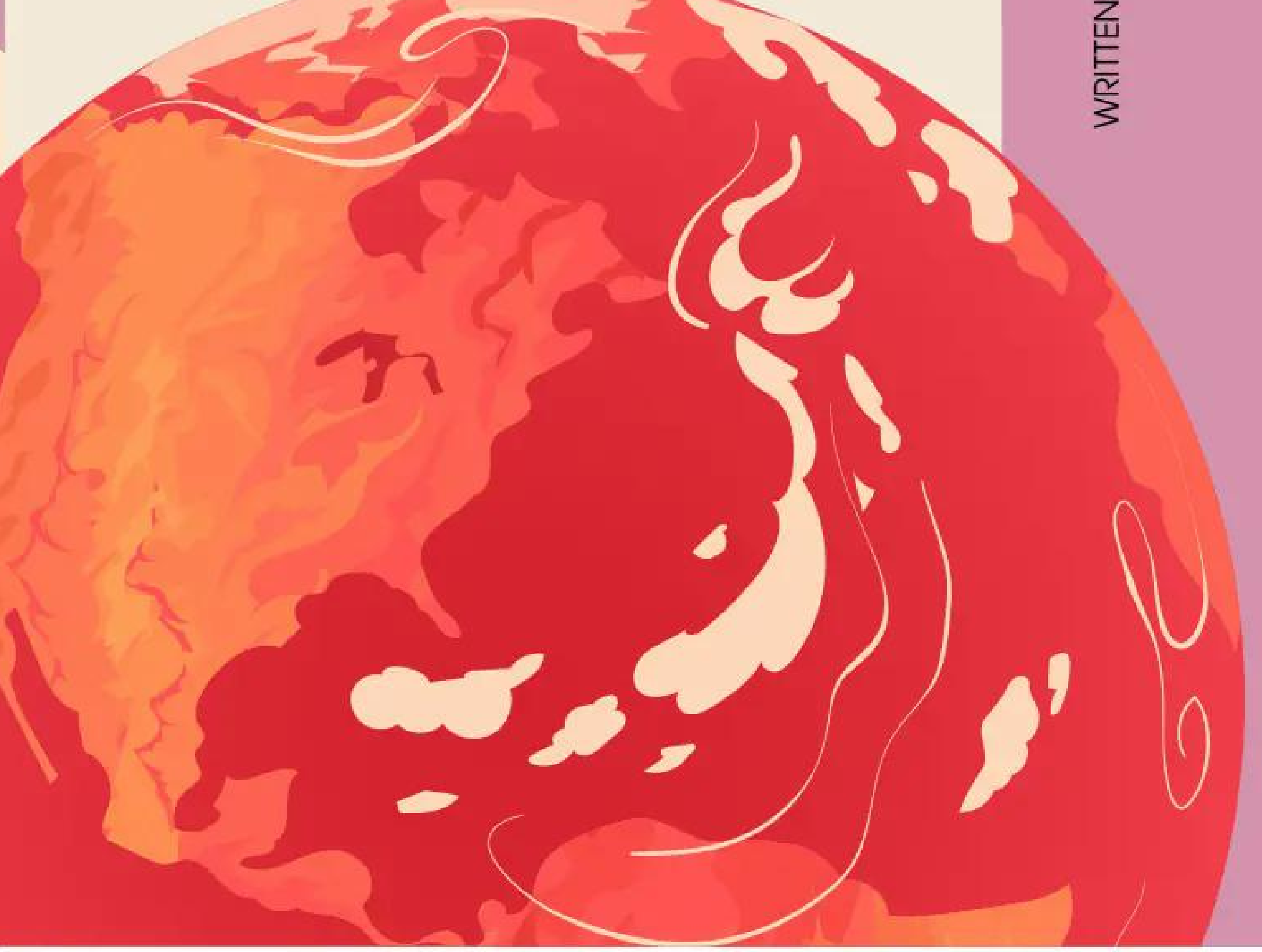
Parties. New school. Old school. College, university. New friends, old friends. The teenage years throw more new social situations at you than any other stage of life. Unless you're one of those shiny happy people on TikTok who live perfect lives (and they're pretending for the camera), then new social situations can be stressful. It's difficult enough for natural extraverts. For introverts, it can be torture. This doesn't mean you should hide in your room. But recognise that other people saying how much they're looking forward to Saturday's party doesn't reflect how they're really feeling – they're nervous too. Instead, go with some anti-anxiety measures ready – they're covered throughout this book.

LEAVE ME ALONE!

IT'S ALL GOING TO HELL!

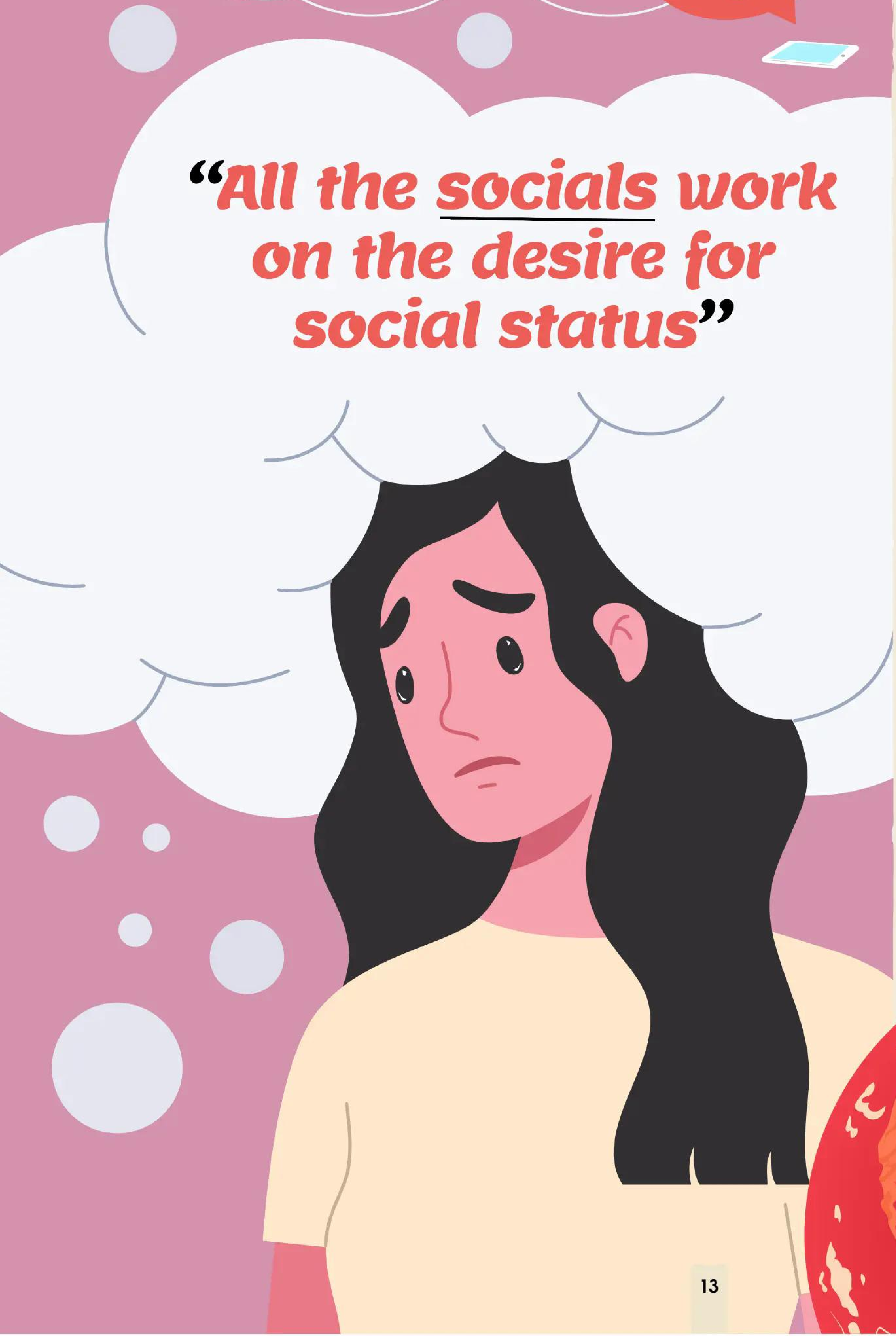
World events, from war to climate change, are enough to make anyone worried

It sometimes seems that everything is spinning out of control. COVID-19 wrecked your schooling. Wars are breaking out all over the place. There's the climate crisis and ecological breakdown. It's enough to make anyone anxious. It might seem like this is the worst time to be young, but it really isn't. Things have always been breaking down but the world keeps stumbling on. Imagine you'd been born in the year 1900. At 14, World War I breaks out. The year after it ends in 1918, the worst pandemic of modern times, Spanish Flu, kills millions (particularly affecting young people). The Great Depression in the 1930s leaves millions destitute and then, just when things are getting back together, World War II breaks out and you're still only 39! That's a lot of bad stuff to live through. And, in history, it's not even unusual. So, yes, it's certainly hard growing up now but things will really have to go to hell to match what the 1900 generation had to face.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Your phone. It's always there, pinging for your attention. Some very clever psychologists have designed social media to work on the deepest, oldest areas of our brains. TikTok, Instagram... all the socials work on the desire for recognition and social status – desires that go deep into our evolutionary past. Your phone pings intermittently: in psychology, this is called intermittent reinforcement and it's the most powerful way to condition a human or an animal to do something. Know how you are being manipulated, then you can do something about it. Remember, you and your friends are the product that social media is selling. Take control.



> **"All the socials work on the desire for social status"**

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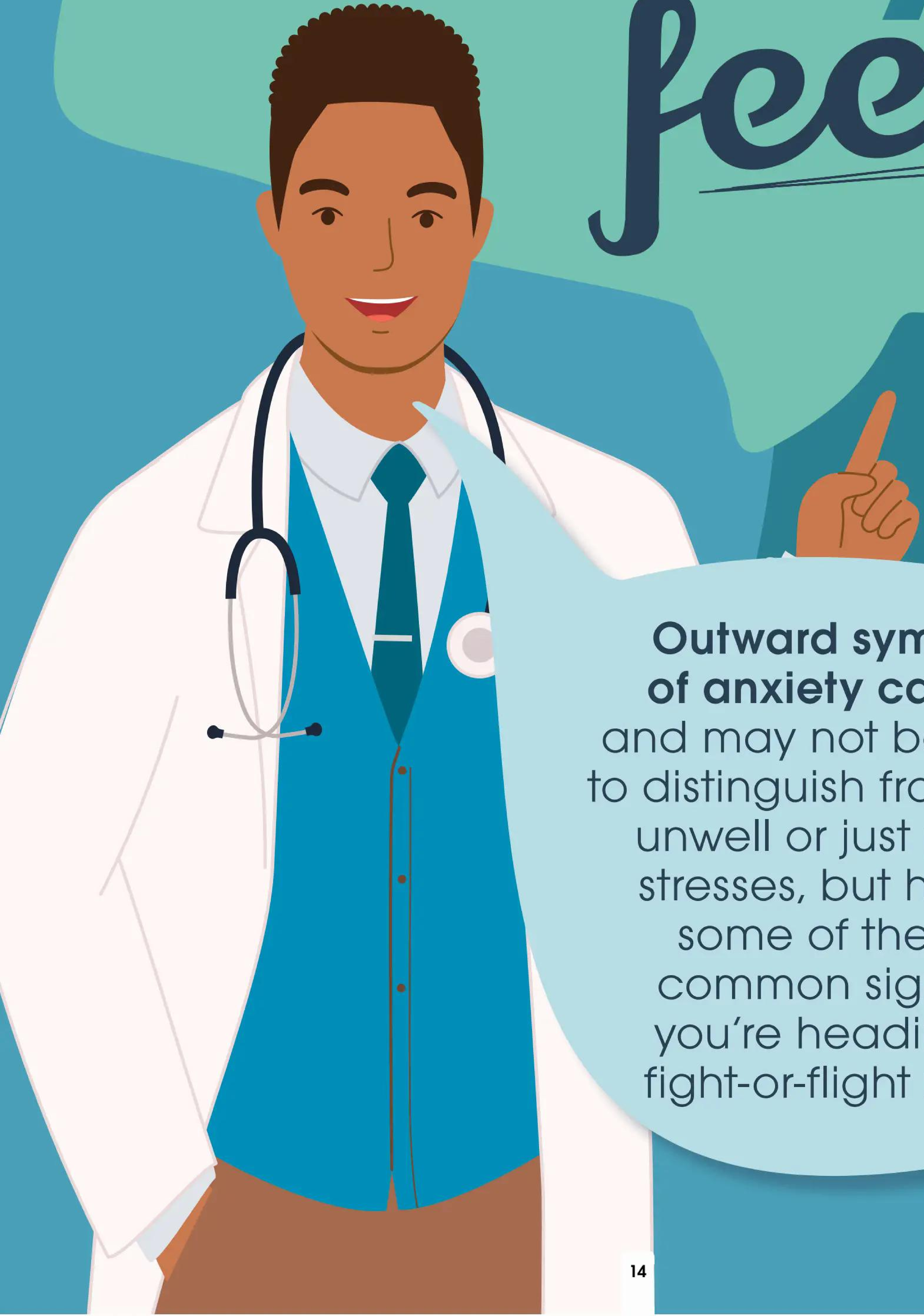
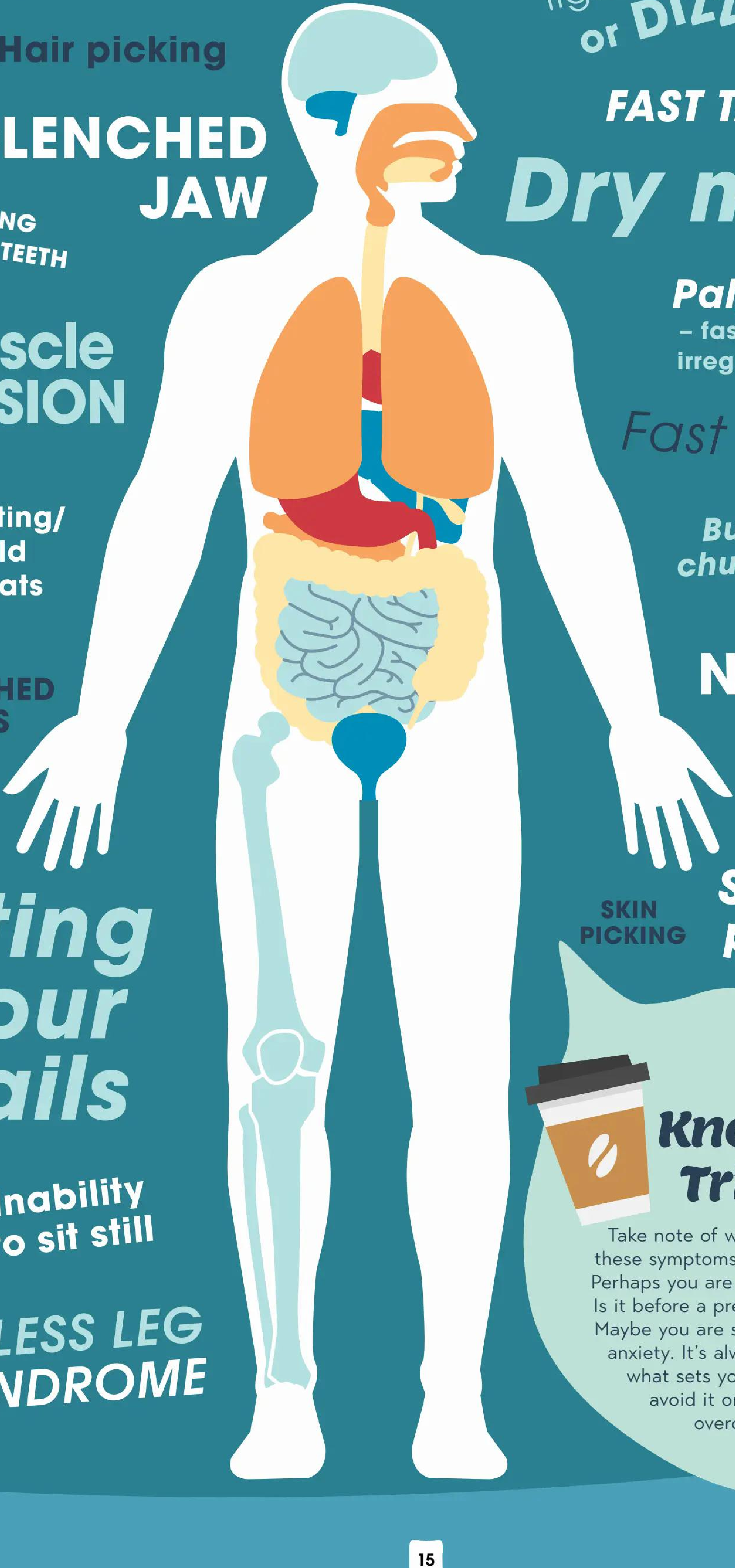
HOW DOES Anxiety feel?



Outward symptoms of anxiety can vary, and may not be so easy to distinguish from feeling unwell or just passing stresses, but here are some of the most common signs that you're heading into fight-or-flight mode...



Headaches

Hair picking

CLENCHED JAW

GRINDING YOUR TEETH

Muscle TENSION

Sweating/ Cold Sweats

CLENCHED FISTS

Biting your nails

Inability to sit still

RESTLESS LEG SYNDROME

Feeling light-headed **or DIZZY**

FAST TALKING

Dry mouth

Palpitations
– fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat

Fast breathing

Butterflies or churning in your stomach

NAUSEA
(feeling sick)

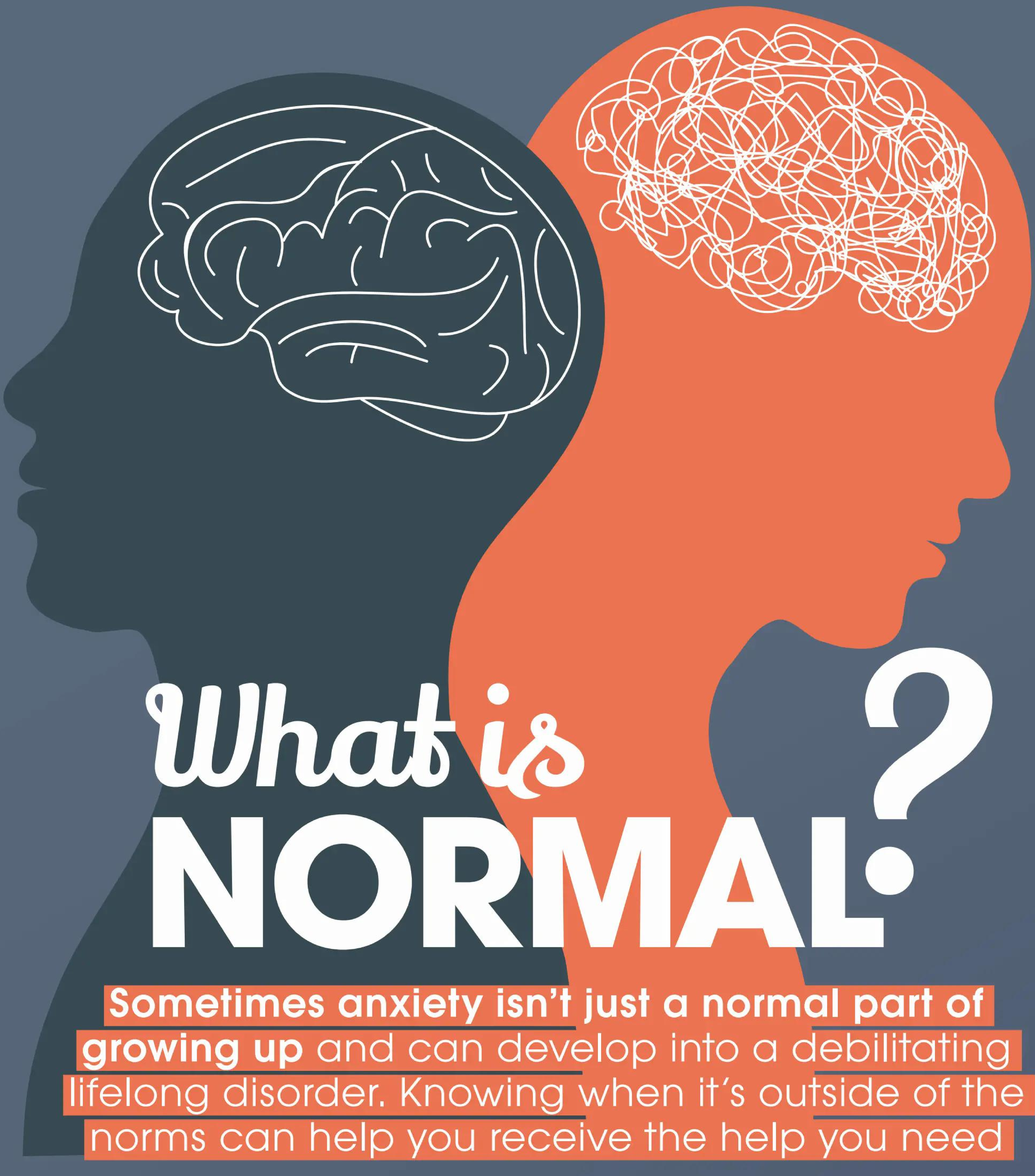
Pins & needles

SKIN PICKING

Sweaty palms

Know Your Triggers!

Take note of when you get any of these symptoms. Is it after a coffee? Perhaps you are sensitive to caffeine. Is it before a presentation at school? Maybe you are struggling with social anxiety. It's always useful to know what sets you off, so you can avoid it or work towards overcoming it.



What is NORMAL?

Sometimes anxiety isn't just a normal part of growing up and can develop into a debilitating lifelong disorder. Knowing when it's outside of the norms can help you receive the help you need

As the saying goes, "what is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly". Essentially, something you find ordinary might seem unusual to someone else. It can be hard to tell if your own anxiety is within the realms of normalcy because you only experience things through your own perspective. But if your anxiety seems different to that of your peers, you might be living with an anxiety disorder.

Many anxiety disorders go hand-in-hand with other mental health conditions. Lots of these are treatable, but there is rarely a 'one size fits all' solution. For example, anti-anxiety medications might be a godsend for some people, while mindfulness or cognitive behavioural therapies are far more effective for others.

Here we look at the most common anxiety disorders to help you decide if your 'ordinary' is actually something you need to talk to a professional about, to get the help you need.

ANXIETY VS ANXIETY DISORDER

Anxiety is normal. It is a natural response and the internal alarm that warns us when something isn't right. The problem with anxiety today is that more things can trigger this alarm than ever before. If anxiety hangs around or evolves in intensity, it can transition into a disorder that may get worse over time. Treatment is essential if you want to learn the tools that will help you to cope with this excessive form of anxiety.

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)

By far the most common anxiety disorder, affecting up to 5% of the UK population. GAD is characterised by persistent and pervasive feelings of anxiety about a range of subjects, often based on unrealistic or extreme 'worst-case' outcomes. If you've got GAD you might not be able to remember the last time you did not feel anxious. Reasons for this vary, and might be attributed to anything from an imbalance of brain chemicals, genetics, or as a result of previous life experiences.

Symptoms:

Restlessness; insomnia; heart palpitations; feelings of excessive worry or dread; mundane things like long-distance road trips can trigger fears of a fatal road accident, while social occasions might cause premonitions of complete social embarrassment and scorn. In short, no subject is off the table when it comes to creating unnecessary worry.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Triggered by a traumatic event that is either experienced or witnessed, PTSD was first recognised in soldiers during World War I, who presented with post-traumatic symptoms labelled as 'shell shock'. However, PTSD is not just present in those who have experienced or survived war. Those who have experienced violence and sexual assault, traumatic accidents, grief, deeply disturbing, distressing, dangerous and/or damaging situations or events involving intense fear, helplessness or stress, can also develop PTSD.

Symptoms:

Flashbacks of the trauma; nightmares and severe anxiety, including panic attacks; persistent dwelling; feelings of panic when reminded of the event or when something triggers the memory; feelings of detachment and low self-worth; irritability; problems with memory; depression; headaches; mood swings; unusually aggressive behaviour; nervousness; easily startled; sleep disturbances, and many more. Diagnosis is usually made when these symptoms persist for over a month.

SOCIAL ANXIETY

Formerly referred to as 'social phobia', social anxiety impedes your enjoyment of social situations by shrouding you in an overwhelming fear of feeling judged and/or worry of being rejected. It usually starts during the teenage years, and can have long-lasting effects into adulthood, when sufferers avoid attending certain social settings and even suffer from panic attacks.

Symptoms:

Fear of judgement; fear of public speaking and struggling to communicate in social situations; everyday tasks, like a visit to a shop, can provoke physiological symptoms such as blushing, sweating or trembling, while making eye contact is also difficult; worrying about talking to strangers – or even friends and family – in person or on the phone, whether it's somewhere you are familiar with, or an unfamiliar location.

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

This condition is closely associated with anxiety. It is a common disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, intruding recurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviours (compulsions) that, when enacted, alleviate anxiety. It is recognised that certain personality types – those who prefer neatness and order – may have a propensity to develop this condition.

Symptoms:

A fear of germs, leading to excessive cleaning and hand washing; obsession with order, leading to continuously rearranging or organising objects; a strong belief something bad will happen unless something is 'just so'; constant checking that things are turned off, locked or closed; having to touch something.

TOURETTE'S SYNDROME

Tic disorders (known as 'Tourette's syndrome' when the tics have been present for over a year) have a strong association with anxiety. Tics are defined as sudden involuntary movements or vocalisations that are repetitive and unwanted. Sufferers of tics often describe a strong need to carry out the movement or noise before it happens, and a strong sense of relief once it is done. Tics usually disappear by adulthood. While for many sufferers treatment is not needed, you should seek help if they are impacting significantly on your daily life.

Symptoms:

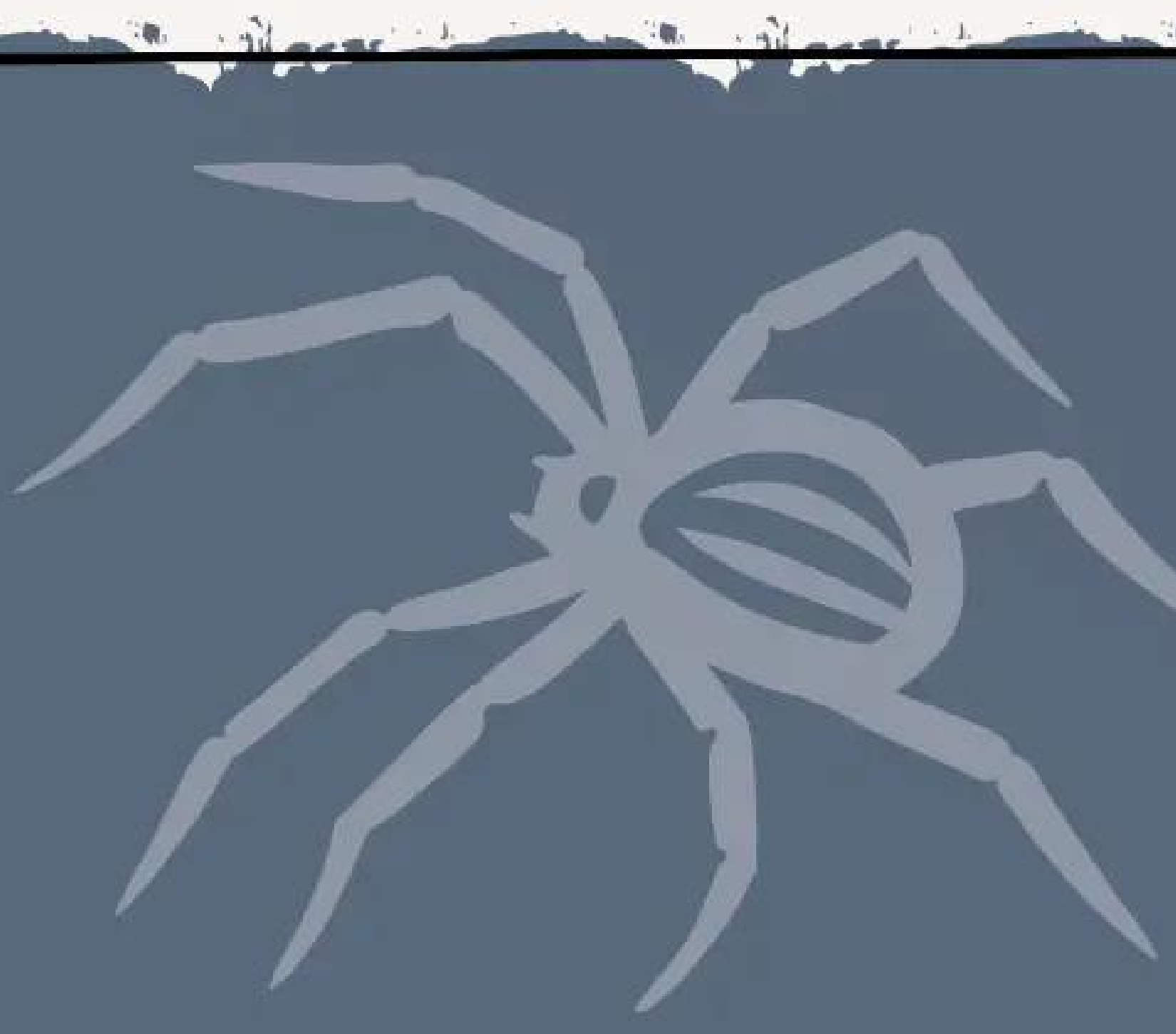
'Motor' tics – facial twitching, eye blinking or head or limb jerking. 'Vocal' tics – repetitive throat clearing, grunting or calling out.

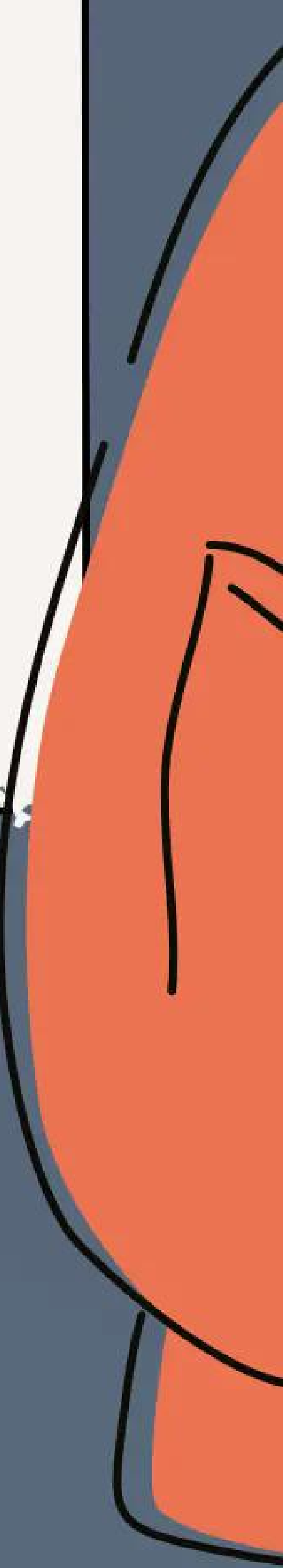
PHOBIAS AND AGORAPHOBIA

Stronger than a fear, a phobia causes extreme distress and can manifest in physical symptoms. Phobias are split into two types: a specific phobia, which is an intense fear of a particular situation, object, animal or activity, and complex phobias, which are usually more deep-rooted in a person's development. A common complex phobia is agoraphobia, which is characterised by a fear of being unable to escape, meaning that it can manifest anywhere, such as on public transport, at school, or simply by leaving your own home. While the fear is often exaggerated, the impact is real, and in some cases can be debilitating and cause misery to a person's life.

Symptoms:

Dizziness; nausea; trembling; sweating, hot and cold flushes; vomiting; heart palpitations; anxiety; feeling out of touch with reality; panic attacks.





PANIC DISORDER

Panic is the most severe physical form of anxiety. With this disorder, panic attacks usually strike without warning and may happen regularly without treatment. A panic attack is defined by a short time period in which an overwhelming surge of anxiety is triggered. Although tempting to avoid situations you suspect may trigger an attack, this only creates a cycle of fear, adding to a foreboding sense of panic. And for some, there may not be a clear trigger. Breathing and relaxation techniques are effective, in addition to talking to a medical professional.

Symptoms:
Panic attacks; overwhelming sense of fear; racing heartbeat; chest pain; dizziness; trembling limbs; a fear of losing control, losing your mind or even dying; difficulty catching your breath.

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)

It isn't unusual to wish for warmer weather in the darkest days of winter, but for those with SAD, the short days cause depression. It isn't known why this occurs, just that for some teenagers – and also adults – their brain reacts to the reduction of light, making a few months of every year very difficult. Thankfully the depression usually lifts once light levels increase, but there are various therapies, such as light therapy and talk therapy, that can help during the bad months.

Symptoms:
Feeling hopeless, irritable, or sad; lacking motivation; low energy levels; losing interest in activities, such as hobbies or going out with friends; experiencing self-doubt; being more sensitive to criticism; sleeping more and finding it difficult to get up; trouble concentrating; comfort eating.

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD) AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

ADHD and ASD can both cause teenagers to frequently experience intense anxiety. Both conditions make the 'normal' experience of being a teenager - progressing at school, going out with friends, taking on more responsibility - difficult and uncomfortable. While symptoms of both occur in childhood, many aren't diagnosed until puberty or later. A person can have both conditions, so it is important to get professional advice to get the right treatment.

Symptoms of ADHD:
Problems at school (low grades, behavioural issues, distracted or chatty); difficulty with organisation and time keeping; few or no friends; being bullied, or being the bully; risk-taking; lack of self-care.

Symptoms of ASD:
Social difficulties, such as not making eye contact, not understanding body language or conversations, problems making friends; feelings of sensory overload, whether it's at school or in crowds; inability to deal with difficult situations; becoming withdrawn; low self-esteem and problems sharing feelings.

Identify the signs of a PANIC ATTACK

Panic attacks can look different for everyone, so it is important that we can **identity some of the key symptom**s in ourselves and others to **help get things back under control**

Panic attacks are a type of fear response – a sort of exaggerated reaction to how our body usually copes with danger, stress or even excitement. Panic attacks can happen in many different circumstances but are often linked to feelings of anxiety and fear. If you suffer from repeated panic attacks then you might notice that they are triggered by a particular place or activity – for example before doing something that causes you stress. If you find yourself having a lot of panic attacks, then it would be advised that you talk to your doctor about it.

Being able to identify when a panic attack is happening will help you to manage it. Here we look at some of the most common signs.

SERIOUS PANIC ATTACKS CAN BE SCARY AND IN WORSE CASES, SOME LIKEN THEM TO THE FEELING OF HAVING A HEART ATTACK AND FEELING LIKE THEY'RE GOING TO DIE.

CHILLS OR SWEATING

Sweating in the palms of your hands or under your armpits, or sudden chills and shivering when conditions are fair, can be signs of a panic attack. In this situation breathing exercises can come in handy – you might be sweating because your heart rate has increased, for example.

DIZZINESS AND TINGLING

Often symptoms of a panic attack are caused by changes in blood pressure, which means you might experience dizziness or tingling in your arms, hands and fingers.

RACING HEARTBEAT

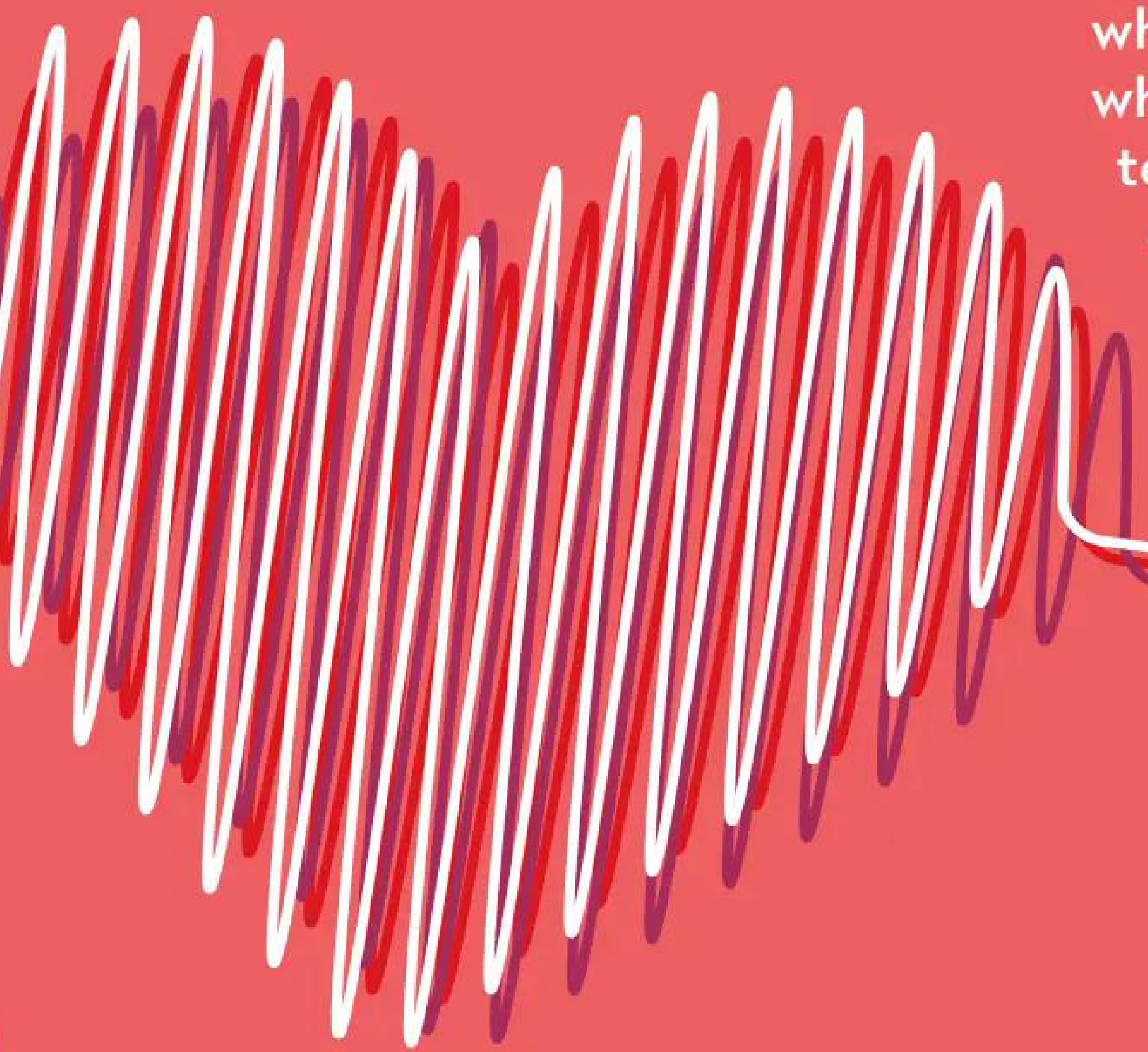
An increased heartbeat is a common symptom of a panic attack. Most people will feel this in their chest without having to test a pulse point, and a fast heart rate will often add to the anxious feelings the person is experiencing. It's important to try and counter it with some intentional breathing exercises to calm this physical reaction down. Concentrate on your breathing. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth.

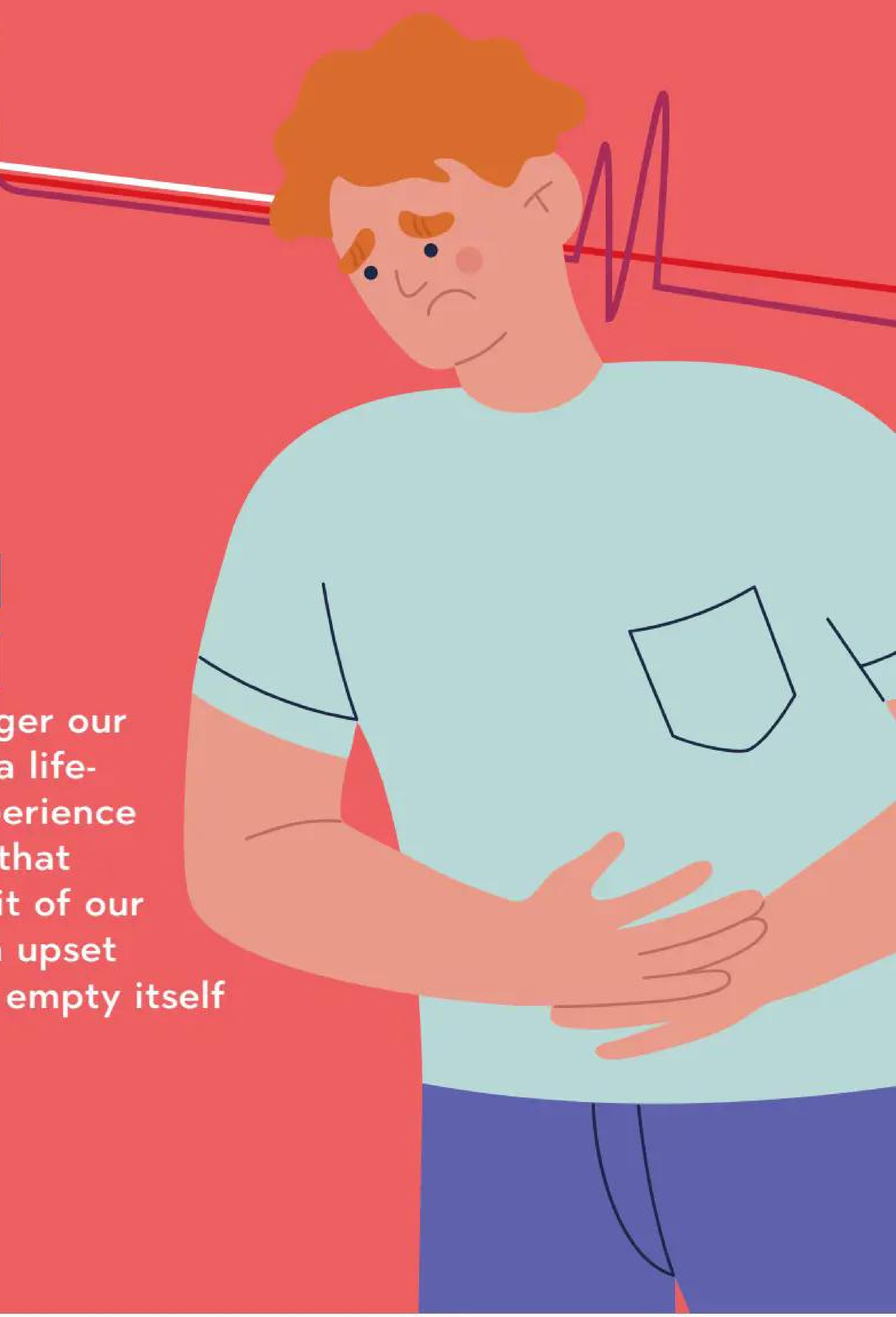
LOSS OF CONTROL

Feeling like you are out of control is a common symptom of a panic attack. Trying to ground yourself with touch can help in this situation. Rubbing something textured like carpet, wood or stone can help you focus on calming yourself down. Or stroke your pet if you have one.

MUSCLE TENSION

Muscular tension in your upper back, neck and shoulders can also be a sign of a panic attack. Attempt to relax your body and calm these reactions down. Distract yourself by taking a mindful moment with the environment around you. Think about what you can see, what you can smell, what you can hear – this small distraction technique might be enough to help slow everything down.





TIGHTNESS IN YOUR STOMACH

An anxiety or panic attack can often trigger our body's natural fight-or-flight response. In a life-threatening situation, the fear that we experience can trigger physical reactions in the body that often feel like having a ball or fist in the pit of our stomach. This response can also give us an upset stomach because our body is preparing to empty itself to be ready to fight or run.

Help Yourself TO HEAL

From **podcasts** to **publications**, there is a wealth of information available to support those **struggling with anxiety**

Coping with the challenges that anxiety brings can be difficult, but it's vital to remember that you are not powerless. Thanks to the wonders of technology there are numerous tools that can help you to make sense of your feelings and develop strategies to reduce the symptoms and overall impact of anxiety, and if this approach doesn't work for you, a professional therapist can guide you. Let's take a look at how you can empower yourself to put anxiety in its place.

Podcasts

Tune out those anxious thoughts by tuning in to some of the best self-help podcasts

Whether it's school, catching up with friends, homework or juggling commitments, being a teenager can be a busy time, and often you won't be able to sit down and dedicate hours to reading a self-help book or scrolling through an app. But that doesn't mean you need to miss out on all the excellent content that might help you make sense of your feelings and have a laugh along the way. Podcasts are an ideal way to get expert advice on a whole range of subjects while you're on the go. Here are five we recommend trying.

HAPPIER *with Gretchen Rubin*
Hosted by bestselling author Gretchen Rubin and her younger sister, Elizabeth, this uplifting listen offers a range of insights and tips on how to live a life that will make you happier. If you're pushed for time, the 'Little Happiers' segments can be a quick boost.

THE HARDCORE SELF HELP PODCAST *with Duff the Psych*
Cutting out the scientific jargon and getting to the point, this podcast (courtesy of psychologist Robert Duff) discusses a range of subjects including anxiety, depression, relationships and sex.

OKAY. NOW WHAT?! *with Kate Gladdin*
Presented by motivational speaker and life coach Kate Gladdin, this podcast gives teens and young adults the tools to better handle their anxiety, enhance their self-confidence and approach the various challenges of adult life.

MINDFUL THINGS
When it comes to casting a light on the battle with mental health, who better than a former patient at McLean Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Massachusetts. Now a digital media specialist at McLean, Trevor Chamberlain's honest and moving insight is a captivating listen.

OWNING IT: THE ANXIETY PODCAST *with Caroline Foran*
This podcast is all about tackling your anxiety head-on. From delving into how the brain really works to honing the skills required to understand and live with anxiety, author Caroline Foran gives a fresh perspective well worth your time.

WRITTEN BY: BEE GINGER. IMAGES: GETTY

MAKE CONNECTIONS!

Online communities like Kooth (**www.kooth.com**) can really help when you need a safe place to ask for advice. They offer ten to 25 year olds advice and guidance from their BACP-accredited team, discussions boards and informative articles. They also offer a personal online diary where you can record your emotions and feelings so you can reflect back on them later and see your progress.

Apps

Professional help is at your fingertips

MINDSHIFT

www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt

This is aimed at helping you to challenge negativity and develop effective ways of thinking. They use scientifically-proven strategies based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in order to "help you learn to relax and be mindful, develop more effective ways of thinking, and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety". It is aimed at teenagers and is free to download and use.

SMILING MIND

www.smilingmind.com.au

Both a meditation and mindfulness app aimed at seven to 18 year olds, this app is packed with short, relatable videos, guided meditations and all the information you could need. Think of it as a helpful and easy to use self-care toolkit.

CLEAR FEAR

www.clearfear.co.uk

Created by teenage mental health charity stem4, this app helps you to face your fears, learn to reduce your physical anxiety responses with relaxation techniques, aid you in changing your thoughts and behaviours and take control over your emotions.

Books

Allow the written word to help you turn the page on anxiety

Feeling independent and confident can be extra difficult when you have anxiety because your worries and fears often hold you back. Self-help books can help you through your feelings and assist you in taking control of your anxiety before it begins to take control of you.

THE ANXIETY WORKBOOK FOR TEENS

By Rebecca Louise Yates, published by White Books Publications

In this journal you can write your goals, feelings, achievements and anything else that you feel is important, which can make it easy to monitor your progress. It includes to-do lists, positive affirmations, gratitude pages, a physical workout planner and prompts to help put your mindset into perspective.

THE DBT SKILLS WORKBOOK FOR TEENS

By Teen Thrive (also available on audiobook and Kindle)

This workbook is a fun guide to managing stress and anxiety, helping you to learn effective communication skills and better understand your emotions by using DBT, a form of therapy that can lead you to accepting yourself while also working to improve on the things you don't particularly like about yourself.

HAPPY CONFIDENT ME

By Annabel Rosenhead and Nadim Saad, published by The Happy Confident Company

This daily journal has been developed by psychotherapist Annabel Rosenhead and parenting expert Nadim Saad to boost a child's happiness, resilience and self-esteem through gratitude, mindfulness and positive thinking. This daily journal is beneficial to both children and parents and is one of three titles in the Happy Confident series of positivity journals.

ANXIETY SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR TEENS: CBT SKILLS TO OVERCOME FEAR, WORRY, AND PANIC

by Jennifer Shannon, published by New Harbinger Publications

This book concentrates on using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), along with acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) to help navigate the milestones teenagers face as they reach adulthood and shows them how best to take control of their anxiety.

> **"There are tools that help make sense of feelings"**

HELP!

What to do if anxiety and stress are ruining your life

If anxiety is threatening to take over your life, if you can't sleep, if things are getting too much, even if you just think you need some help to get through, then you should see your doctor. There are many types of help available through your doctor. Here we look at just some of them.

The first stop is the various types of talking therapies. If you go to see your doctor about anxiety or other mental health problems, they will probably refer you to a specialist mental health team, depending on where you live. These services usually employ techniques based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT for short). This has been shown to be the most effective form of talking therapy. It normally consists of six initial sessions, each an hour long, where the psychologist or therapist works with you to understand your problem and provides strategies to overcome it. It's a focussed and clear approach. The strategies sometimes include relaxation and meditation techniques to help control feelings of anxiety, or ways to identify and avoid triggers.

Talking therapies have the advantage of not having any side effects but they don't work for everyone. In that case your doctor, in consultation with you, might prescribe medication. There are a number of effective medicines but before starting a course you should ask about the length of treatment – is this a short course of medicine or longer? – and any possible side effects. When starting a course of medical treatment, make sure to arrange regular follow-up appointments with your doctor so that you can report on progress and if there have been any side effects.

The normal first-try drugs are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). These help to keep

TYPES OF THERAPY

There are several ways in which a professional therapist can teach you to control your anxiety

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Effective talking therapy that helps people to recognise thought patterns that spark their anxiety and replace them with more positive ones.

Interpersonal therapy (IPT)

Talking therapy that confronts issues such as poor communication and teaches healthy, sustainable ways in which to handle any conflict and express feelings.

Exposure therapy

The therapist slowly exposes the patient to things that they have identified as anxious triggers and helps them to use relaxation techniques and tools to remain calm.

Psychodynamic therapy

This therapy is aimed at digging into traumas suffered during childhood in a safe and supportive environment, to enable a patient to move forwards.

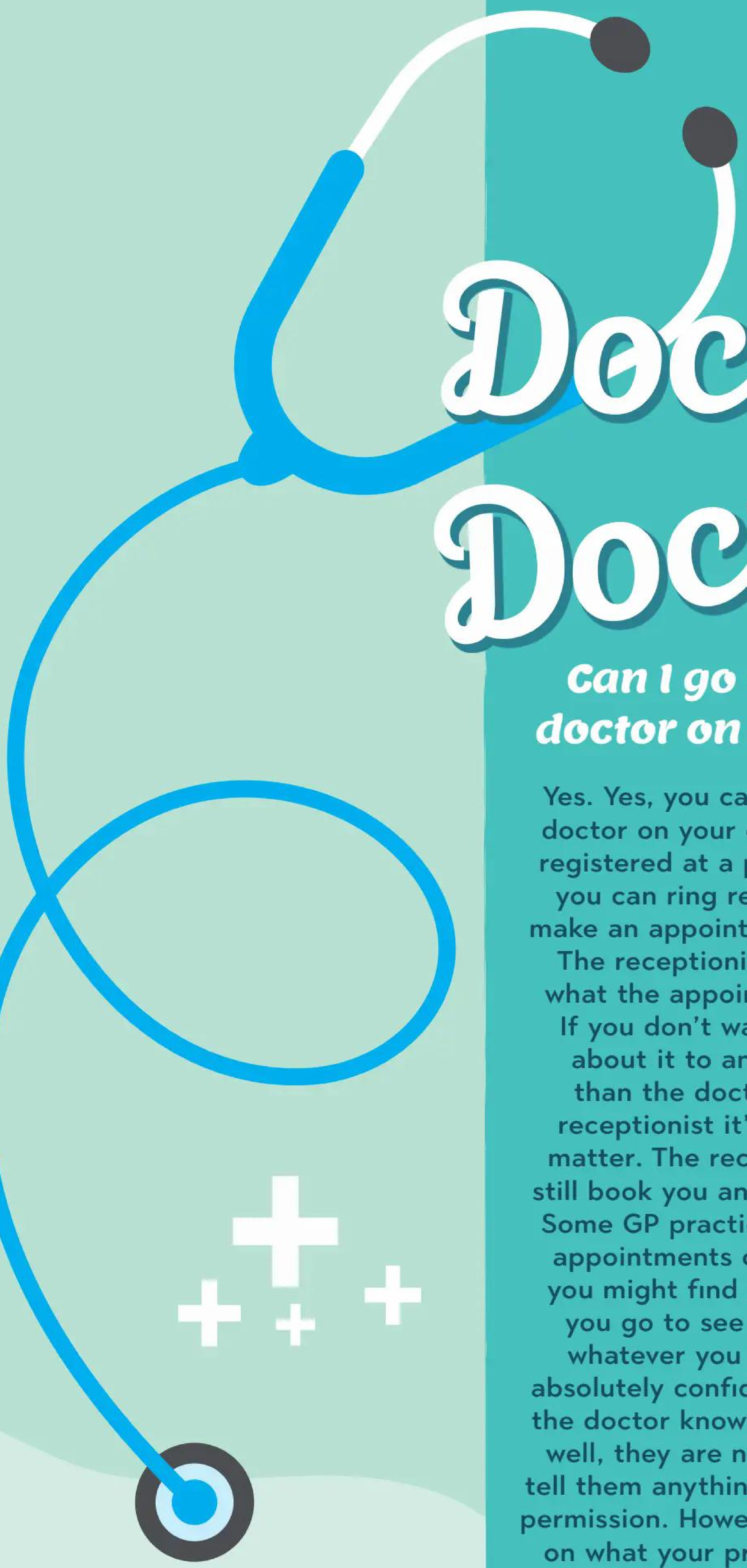
Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT)

Teaches mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness and emotional regulation, in either a one-on-one session or group setting.

serotonin, your natural mood booster, at higher levels. Should these prove ineffective, your doctor might try you on serotonin and noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), which add the neurotransmitter noradrenaline to the mix. In the right dose, noradrenaline helps you remain focussed, alert and alive.

If SSRIs and SNRIs don't work, your doctor might prescribe pregabalin or benzodiazepines. Pregabalin, which was originally developed for epilepsy, has been found to help in the treatment of anxiety. Benzodiazepines are powerful sedatives, which can be a useful short-term measure to treat intense feelings of anxiety. However, they can't be used for very long as they can be addictive.

Should none of these options work, or you think that you want more specialised help, then you can ask your doctor to refer you to a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specialises in mental health (a psychologist is a health professional trained in psychology but they are not a doctor and cannot prescribe drug treatments). A psychiatrist will have the full range of possible treatments at their disposal, from counselling through to drug therapies.



Doctor! Doctor!

Can I go to see a doctor on my own?

Yes. Yes, you can go to see a doctor on your own. If you're registered at a practice, then you can ring reception and make an appointment yourself. The receptionist might ask what the appointment is for. If you don't want to speak about it to anyone other than the doctor, tell the receptionist it's a personal matter. The receptionist will still book you an appointment. Some GP practices now book appointments online, which you might find easier. When you go to see the doctor, whatever you tell them is absolutely confidential. Even if the doctor knows your parents well, they are not allowed to tell them anything without your permission. However, depending on what your problem is, the doctor might encourage you to speak to your parents or another adult but the decision is always yours. The appointment will probably last for about ten minutes. The doctor will ask you what the problem is. You can ask the doctor to answer any questions you have. If you think you will be anxious, it might be a good idea to write down what you want to say, or a list of your questions. Remember, medical professionals are there to help you, so don't feel ashamed and embarrassed – they have seen it all before. If you feel anxious, just tell them.

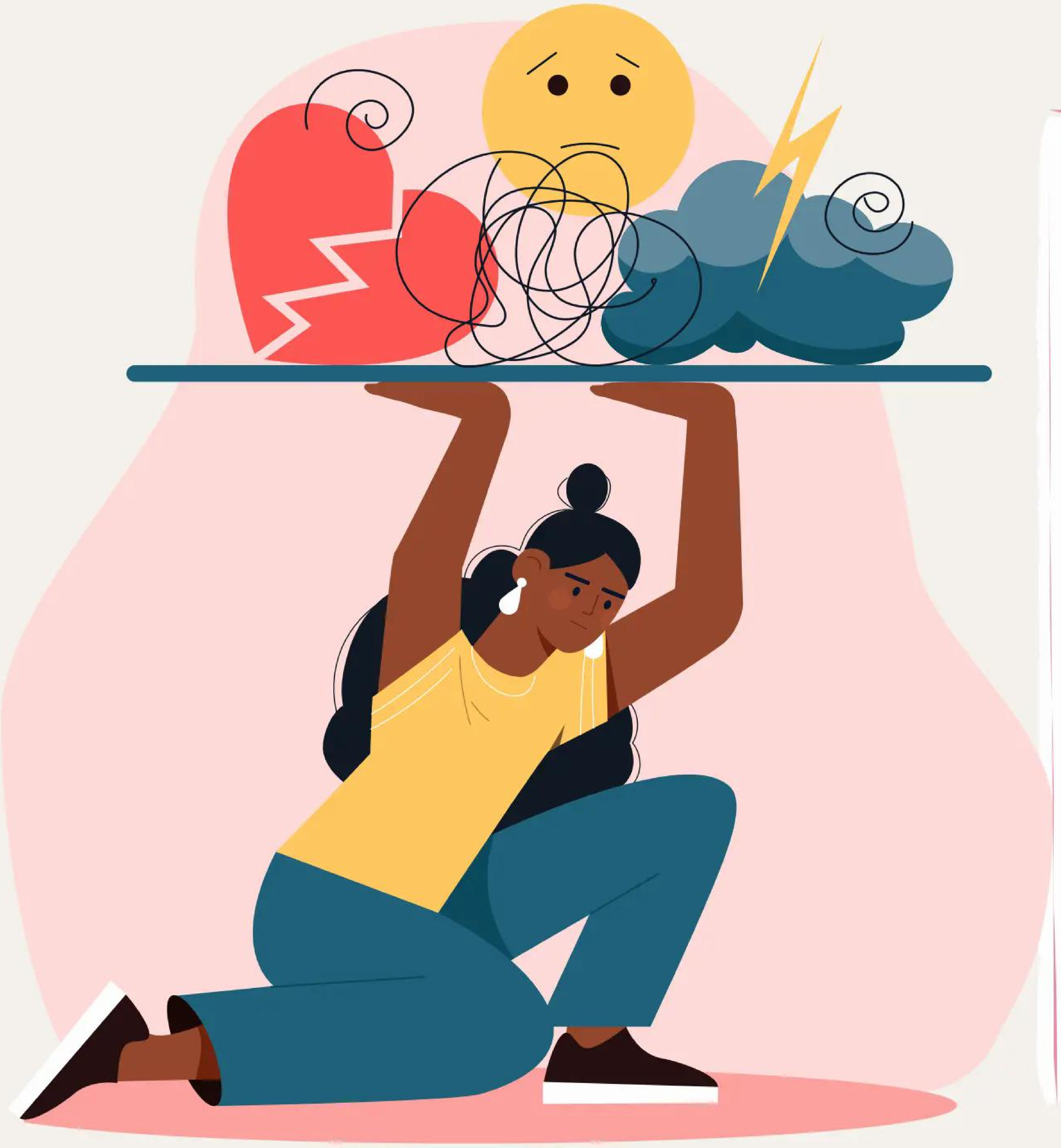
IMAGE SOURCES · GETTY

10 ways TO COMBAT Anxiety

Does worrying stop you living life to the full? Read our tips to help fight those anxious feelings

TAME THE VOICES IN YOUR HEAD

Anxiety can fill your head with nagging negative thoughts. To combat them, remind yourself about positive things that have happened to you and keep repeating these. Think of when you coped successfully with a challenging situation. Picture what happened, where you were and what you did to prove you can overcome difficulties and face issues head-on.



FAKE IT TO MAKE IT

Acting as if you're not worried by something is a great way to lessen your fear. If you behave confidently, other people will pick up on it and respond positively, too. Body language is a great way to 'fake' confidence, so try these ideas:

Stand or sit straight

•

Keep your head level

•

Relax your shoulders

•

Spread your weight evenly on both legs

•

Keep both of your elbows on the arms of the chair if you're sitting down

•

Make eye contact

•

Lower the pitch of your voice

•

Speak more slowly

VISUALISE POSITIVITY

When facing a challenge, visualise how it could turn out positively. For example, if you're feeling anxious about driving to a new place, imagine yourself arriving there safely and calmly. Seeing yourself coping makes your brain believe it's possible. Your positive thoughts need to feel believable, however, or your mind won't accept them as real possibilities.

GO WITH THE FLOW

'Flow' is when the mind is so engaged that there's no room for worry or anxiety. Find something that will help you completely switch off to take you into this state. It could be a gripping book, a puzzle or exercise – anything that will make it hard for your thoughts to wander off into anxiety territory.

NOTE IT DOWN

Write down your more positive thoughts, especially when you first start trying to cut down on negative ones. Try an app called Thought Diary Pro (iOS) to quickly note down a situation, your reactions and thoughts, and how you might change these in the future. Alternatively, just grab a notepad.

SORT YOUR SUPPORT STRATEGY

You'll need a range of strategies to keep anxiety at bay. It's important to build a support network, talk about your worries if you can and surround yourself with positive people who'll make you feel good about yourself. And keep a handy plan written down on paper, or on your phone. This could include:

- *A reminder to accept your thoughts*
- *A reminder to breathe*
- *Photos of things and places that help you feel calm*
- *Names and contact details of supportive friends and family*
- *A list of activities that help you use up anxious energy*

CHANGE YOUR VOCAB

Making simple tweaks to your language – in your head and what you say to others – can make a big difference to how you feel. Try replacing 'but' with 'and'. For example, "I went to the shop but forgot the milk," is very final, while, "I went to the shop and I forgot the milk. I'll buy some after lunch," is much more positive. Avoid extremes like 'always' and 'never'.

PLAN, DON'T WORRY

Worrying about a party invite or getting a task finished at school can mean your mind going over the same problems. If you've got a plan, you have a more positive focus and that will help you get out of the cycle of anxiety. Try following these steps:

- *Identify the problem and the worst-case scenario*
- *Identify the best-case scenario*
- *Look for options and solutions, and choose one*
- *Break your solution down into manageable steps*
- *Review the outcome*

TAKE BABY STEPS

If there's something that you'd like to do but the idea of it makes you anxious, make a list of small steps you could take towards it, starting with the least anxiety-provoking. Focus on your end goal.

TRUST YOUR BODY

When you're anxious you might experience a tight sensation in your chest or throat and you may think you're not getting enough air. This can cause panic and light-headedness, and a cycle of anxiety begins. Remind yourself that you won't suddenly stop breathing. Prove it by taking a deep breath and holding it for as long as possible. Your breathing will return to normal and it can help you feel more confident about your ability to keep breathing in stressful situations.

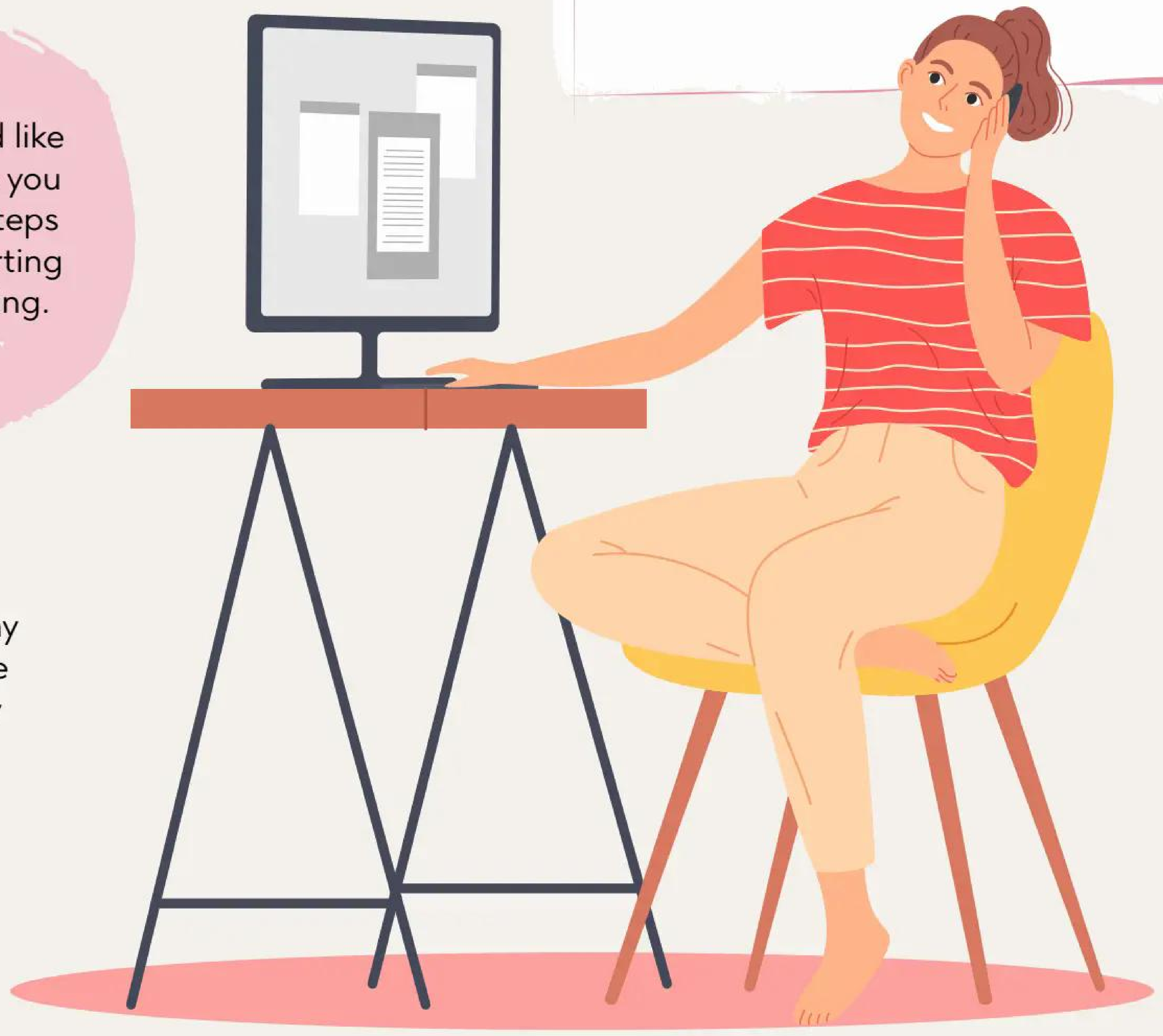


IMAGE SOURCES © GETTY

10 ways TO STOP OVERTHINKING

These simple tips and tricks will help you calm your racing mind...

CREATE A 'WORRY CHARACTER'

Chloe Brotheridge, author of *The Anxiety Solution* (Penguin) suggests one interesting solution – giving your overthinking a persona. "Imagine it as a character who's constantly worrying about things," she explains. "Imagine how they look, think and behave. Then imagine you can comfort them and remind them that things are okay, or that they can handle whatever happens. This can help separate yourself from your overthinking and you'll find it easier to view your thoughts more objectively."

BOOST YOUR ENDORPHINS

You might not fancy a workout when you feel low, but exercise produces uplifting endorphins and can be a great way to alleviate anxiety. It can also improve sleep, which boosts your mood. "Motivate yourself by signing up to a fitness challenge like a 5K fun run," says Dr Nerina Ramlakhan, author of *Tired but Wired* (Souvenir Press). "Having a goal focuses your energy, and it will give you a sense of achievement."

SET A 'WORRY SLOT'

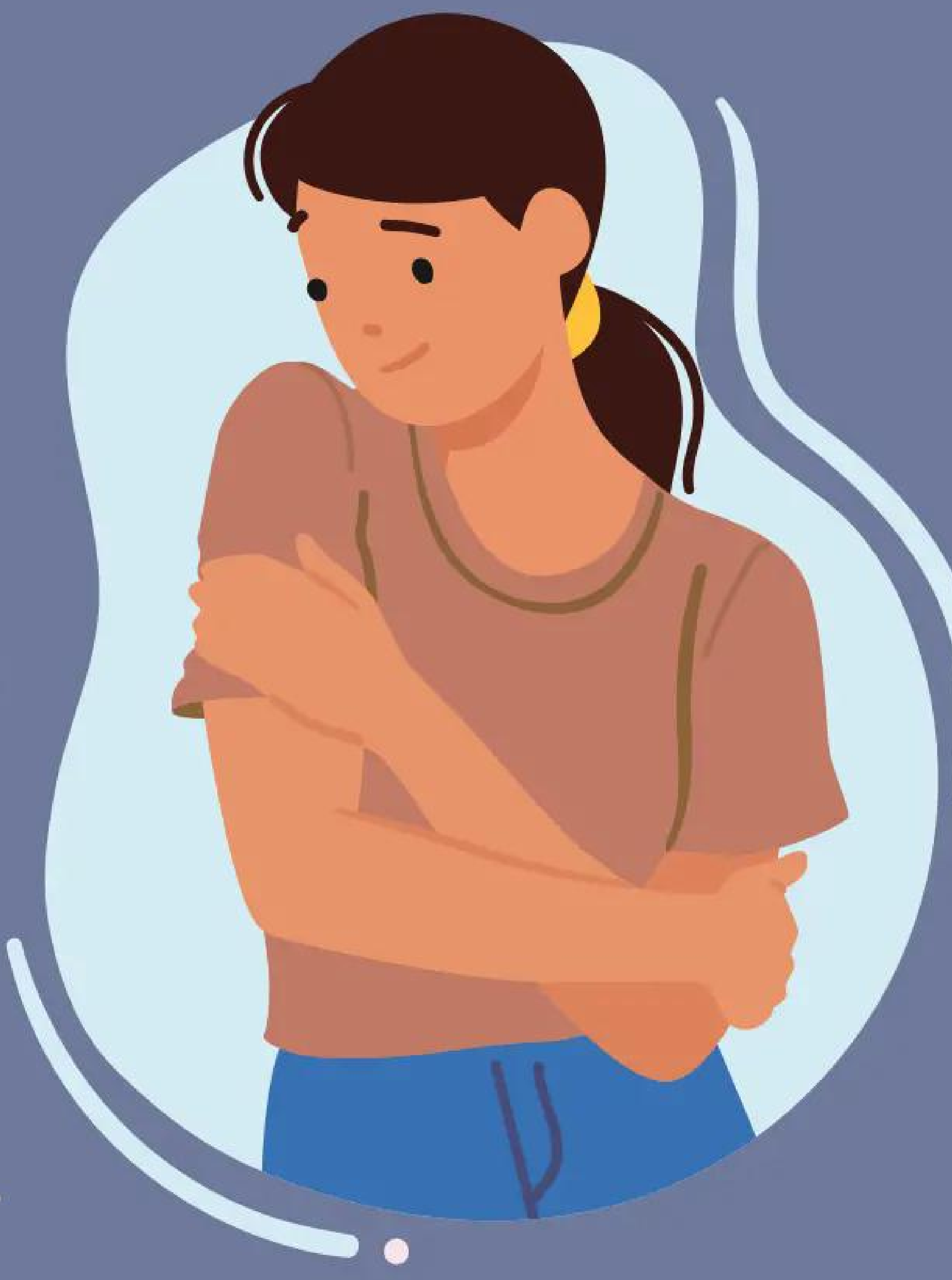
It isn't always possible to 'let go' of worries, so Chloe suggests allocating 15 minutes in your day for overthinking. "If you start to ruminate outside of this time, gently remind yourself to save it for later," she says. "During your 15 minutes, jot down your worries and think of any action you can take on the thing you're overthinking. Action is often the fastest way out of anxiety."

USE YOUR HANDS

An activity that requires hand-eye coordination can be a fantastic way to distract yourself from a frantically racing mind. "This could be anything from knitting, to painting or gardening," suggests Chloe, who owns the **calmer-you.com** website. "Doing something physical can help shift your focus away from your thoughts."

TRY HAVENING

Try this version of havening, a technique that can reduce the symptoms of anxiety. “Cross your arms, place your palms on your shoulders and stroke your arms downwards to your elbows,” says Dr Nerina (**drnerina.com**). “Keep repeating this, brushing your hands down your arms. While you do this repeat the words, ‘I am safe, I am safe in my body, I am safe in my life’. It might sound a little bizarre, but it’s a great stress-buster.”



CONNECT WITH YOURSELF

If you wake up feeling anxious, try this trick. Check in with your breathing and follow it for five exhalations, while asking yourself ‘How am I feeling right now?’ advises Dr Nerina, author of *Finding Inner Safety* (Capstone). “It’s tempting to pick up our mobile phones when we wake, partly because we think connecting with people will help us feel calm and safe. But looking at social media or the headlines can have the opposite effect. This is such a simple routine, but it helps you not to get caught up in overthinking – we feel much calmer if we connect with ourselves instead.”

EMBRACE ‘MUNDANE MINDFULNESS’

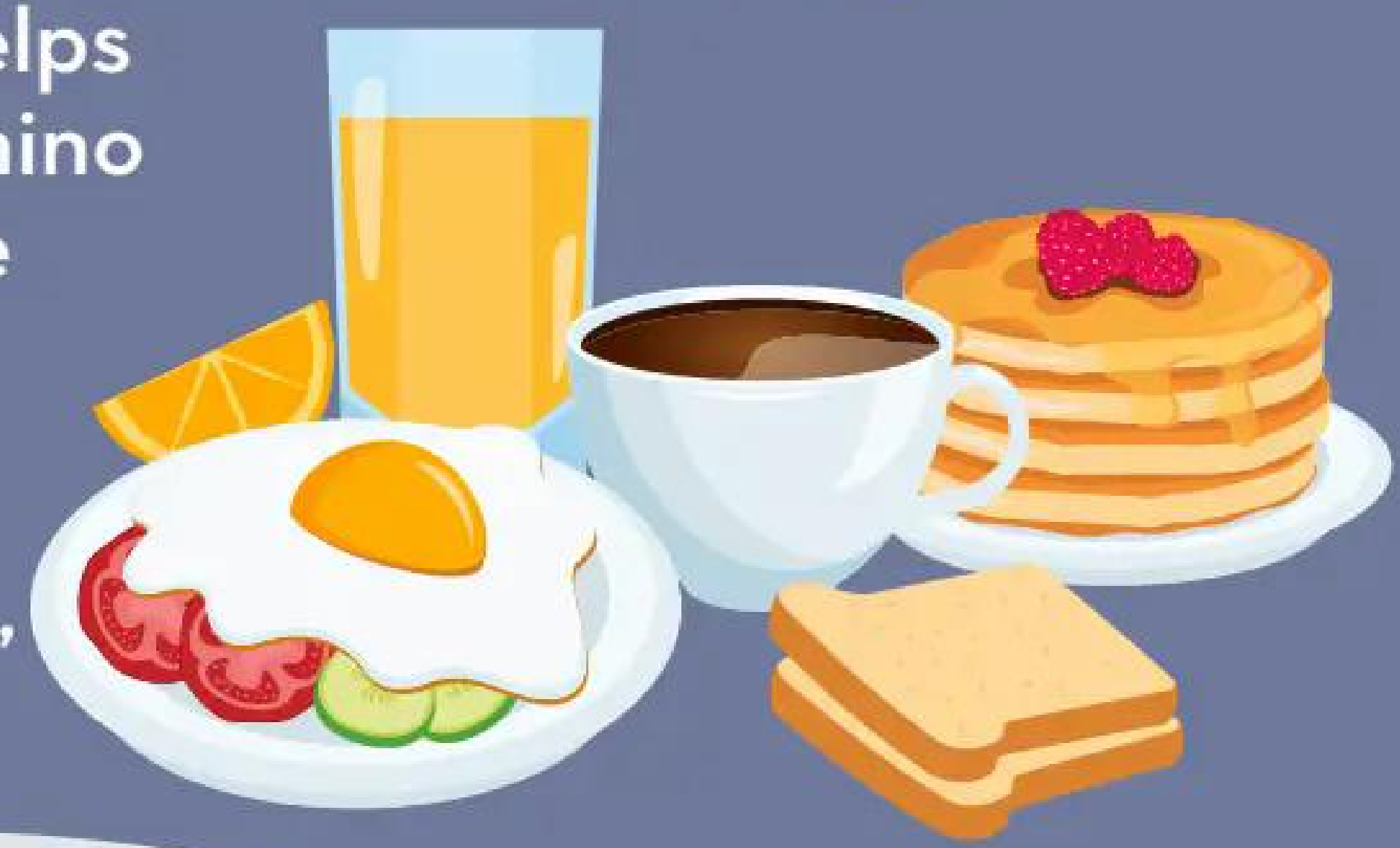
Bringing your mind into the present moment is a great way to stop those whirling thoughts. “Choose an activity you wouldn’t usually pay much attention to and focus all your attention on it,” says Chloe, who hosts The Calmer You Podcast. “It could be brushing your teeth, tying your shoelaces, or eating a piece of fruit.”

USE A ‘THOUGHT STOP’ SIGNAL

When you notice yourself getting swallowed up in overthinking, Chloe suggests choosing a physical gesture – like clicking your fingers or snapping a hair band against your wrist – to bring your thoughts back to the present. “Use this signal as a reminder to pause and redirect your thoughts,” she explains.

EAT AN EARLY BREAKFAST

If you’re tempted to skip breakfast, think again. Dr Nerina says that if you’re running on anxiety and you don’t eat, you can stay in that mode. On the flipside, eating early helps your body produce happy hormones and calms the mind. “Eat breakfast within half an hour of getting up, particularly if you wake up feeling anxious,” she says. “Include protein, like scrambled eggs or a nut butter. It’ll stabilise blood sugar levels and helps provide the amino acids to make the wellbeing hormones oxytocin and serotonin.”

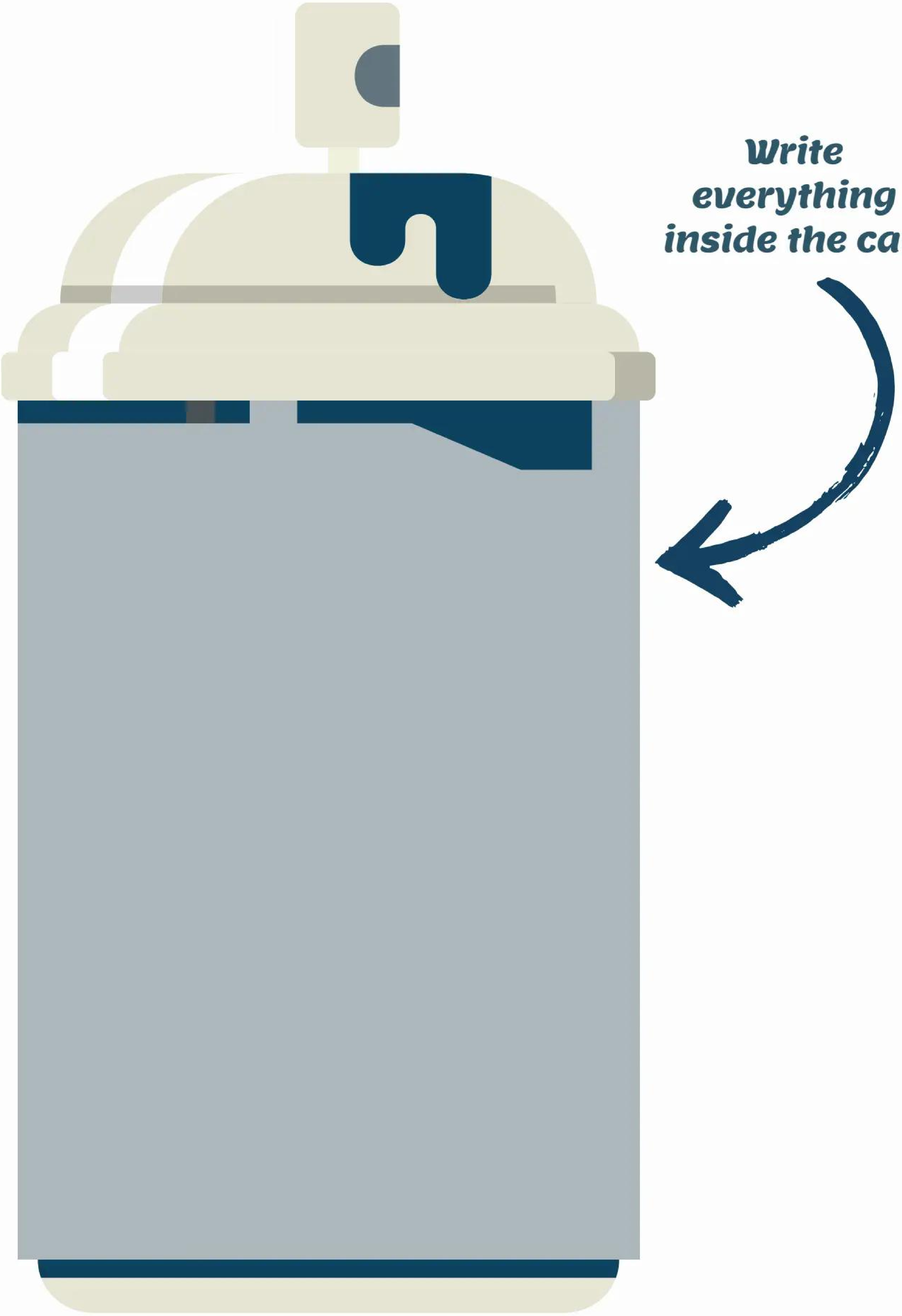


NOTICE PLEASURE

Our natural negativity bias means our brains are hardwired to look for what’s wrong in our lives. But Dr Nerina says we can retrain our brain to notice the good in life. “We need to repeatedly tell it when something good is happening,” she says. “Exercising those pleasure muscles fires up the neurological pathways that make you feel more positive.” Dr Nerina recommends incorporating ‘pleasure shots’ into your day, and relishing them. “It could be a walk, or your morning cup of tea. The more you tell yourself how pleasurable it is, the more receptive your brain becomes to receiving pleasure.”

The STRESS Canister

Empty everything that is in your head concerning friends, study, work and home life into your stress canister below


Write everything inside the can

Everyone has varying tolerances to stress. Think about how full your stress canister is. Is there much space left? Visualise the pressure building inside the can as you add to it. Some people are able to cope with more than others. Having the ability to cope with less at once isn't necessarily a bad thing, it just means that you probably need more support and positive coping strategies, like mindful activities, to stay on top of everything.

Now pretend you are using the spray canister to do some art here. Draw what that would look like

WILL ANY OF THESE STRESSES MATTER A YEAR FROM NOW?

WHAT CAN I CHANGE?

WHAT CAN'T I CHANGE AND NEED TO ACCEPT?

CAN ANYONE HELP ME?

WHAT ARE SOME OF MY UNHELPFUL COPING STRATEGIES?

WHAT ARE SOME OF MY HELPFUL COPING STRATEGIES?

IMAGE SOURCES: GETTY

GOING THROUGH *Changes*

Puberty is a **transformational** time in a young person's life, and with it can come an array of **challenges** and **concerns**, but it's also an **opportunity** to learn to love and **accept** the real you

Prior to the onset of puberty, a child's body really doesn't change a great deal. Almost everyone will have been told as a child that they were growing up too fast by an adoring grandparent or (even worse) their mum – in front of their friends! But apart from the obvious change in height and weight, youngsters before the age of nine follow a pretty steady trajectory. And then puberty hits, and absolutely everything starts to change.

This period of growth sees a child undergo a series of physical and mental changes as they become an adolescent (a teenager in other words) and then a fully grown adult. Puberty normally begins for girls at around the age of nine (sometimes a little earlier), while boys tend to start noticing their bodies changing at 11. Divided into five main stages, this spell of rapid and significant alterations can take many years for it to complete.

Before we explore the many changes that boys and girls experience as they grow, it's important to know that puberty doesn't follow any set rules. One person might undergo physical changes much earlier than someone else, and those transitions will impact each person differently. While very early or delayed puberty (which we will discuss later on) can be a cause for concern that requires medical assistance, usually this is not something most youngsters will need to worry about. However, that isn't to say puberty is easy and that there won't be times when you may feel uncomfortable in your body. You almost certainly will do on occasion, but whatever else you take away from this article, never forget that each person's experience of puberty will be different and there is nothing strange or embarrassing about that.

>

> *"Puberty hits, and everything changes"*

WRITTEN BY: BEE GINGER. IMAGES: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK

EARLY SIGNALS

Before your body begins to change physically it must first prepare, and it will do this when your brain begins to emit signals in the form of hormones. These are molecules in your body that act like messengers, enabling parts of your body to communicate.

As puberty nears, a part of your brain called the hypothalamus (which is in effect the control centre of your brain) will release gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) to the pituitary gland that sits just below it. This gland, which is about the size of a pea, is the 'master gland' that controls all of your other glands. Upon receiving GnRH from the hypothalamus, the pituitary will start to produce sex hormones that in turn will lead to the development of oestrogen (in a female) or testosterone (in a male).

With stage one underway, girls aged between nine and 11 will notice the development of breasts (known as 'buds' at this early stage) underneath their nipples. These can feel tender or itchy, which is completely normal, as are different-sized buds. While some girls may develop larger buds quickly, others may find that theirs remain smaller for longer. This can make for potentially uncomfortable situations in the changing room at school, for example, when comparisons and potentially upsetting observations might be made, but it's completely normal for girls to mature at different speeds as there are a combination of factors, including a person's genetic makeup, that dictate the pace at which someone's body develops.

Boys usually start to see their bodies changing by the age of 11, when their testicles and scrotum begin to grow and pubic hair sprouts on the base of the penis.

Disrupted development

As if puberty wasn't hard enough, there are some conditions that can make it tougher, or even delay it

So far we've explored the many changes that an adolescent will commonly face throughout puberty, but as mentioned earlier, everyone's experience is different. This is doubly true for people with certain conditions that can place obstacles on their already bumpy road to adulthood.

BODY DYSMORPHIA

This involves spending an excessive amount of time worrying over appearance, a condition that can be exacerbated by bullying or teasing at school. This can see a child relentlessly comparing themselves to others, trying to cover up supposed physical flaws and either spending an age in front of the mirror or avoiding their own reflection at all costs.

DIABETES

This can cause girls to reach their period later than usual and disrupt future cycles, while in boys it can prevent sufficient weight gain and slow growth down. Cystic fibrosis (CF) can have a similar effect on a girl's menstrual cycle, while boys who have the condition might develop pubic and facial hair at a later age than their friends and grow at a more gradual rate.

EATING DISORDERS

Speaking of growth, both anorexia and bulimia can lead to stunted growth in adolescents as their bodies are not receiving sufficient food to fuel rapid growth spurts. They can also trigger an early onset of puberty when combined with the anxiety that is often present in the life of someone who has an eating disorder.

HYPOTHYROIDISM

Another condition that can either delay or speed up the arrival of puberty. Natural adolescent development may also be disrupted (in girls) by excessive exercise (which can lead to the loss of regular periods) and head trauma, which is thought to unleash early puberty as a result of damage to the glands that regulate the production of sex hormones. If you have any concerns at all, always consult your doctor.

AN AWKWARD SPOT

Girls mature quicker than boys, and by 12 most young females will find that, along with thicker pubic hair, underarm hair begins to grow. This is perfectly normal and nothing to worry about, but it can lead to embarrassment for girls as beauty trends have historically required females to shave this type of body hair. However, this doesn't mean that you should ever feel pressured to remove body hair. While it's perfectly safe to do so, it must always be a personal choice.

At this point in puberty a girl will undergo a growth spurt of up to 3.2 inches a year. Her breasts will also continue to grow and the hips and thighs will gradually build up fat (the rate of fat increase in girls during puberty is more than double that of boys). On top of all this, she may experience outbreaks of acne for the first time.

While some people get lucky and never seem to get so much as a single spot, others can really suffer with bad outbreaks, which can in turn make them feel conscious when around others. Unfortunately acne is hereditary – if your parents had it then the chances are you will too, but there are plenty of over-the-counter products available that can help to reduce spots. Whatever you do, resist the urge to pop or scratch any spots that appear, as this can lead to scarring.

Boys of 13 may start to get the odd spot, but acne usually comes a year later. However, they will also be experiencing some major changes in their first year as a teen. The penis will elongate as the testicles continue to enlarge. This can then be accompanied by wet dreams (ejaculation during sleep). Some boys can understandably feel embarrassed or even guilty about having wet dreams, but they are simply another part of the journey to manhood and there is nothing that can be done to prevent them.

By the age of 14 a girl will usually have had her first period, a key milestone that normally arrives between the ages of 12 and 14 but sometimes sooner. This is an important stage in a girl's life, but it can bring with it a whole host of concerns, especially when at school or in other situations with peers.

From feeling tired and tender to experiencing mood swings and painful cramps, nobody could say that periods aren't a challenge, doubly so when a girl may need to rush to the loo or be excused from physical activity (such as PE lessons). Others might worry that people will know when they're menstruating or will make fun of them. It's never acceptable for anyone to be made to feel uncomfortable, especially with regards to a natural process they have no control over, but speaking to an adult and remembering to carry tampons or pads can help to alleviate the worries that can surround periods.

As for boys at this stage, they will start to notice that their genitals will continue to grow and their scrotum (the skin around the testicles) will darken. Armpit hair may begin to appear and their voice will deepen. >

"It's never acceptable for anyone to be made to feel uncomfortable"

A WEIGHT OFF

It goes without saying that both sexes confront significant anatomical changes throughout the shift towards maturity, but perhaps the most important thing to know is that during this time both girls and boys will gain a considerable amount of weight.

Girls do most of their growing between the ages of ten and 14, and by the end of this period they could be between 40 and 50 pounds (18 and 23 kilograms, or 2.8 to 3.5 stone) heavier. Boys pile on a similar amount of weight between the ages of 12 and 16, with many gaining 50 to 60 pounds (23 to 27 kilograms, or 3.5 to 4.3 stone). This is a normal, healthy part of growing up and should not be a cause for worry or embarrassment. If weight gain becomes excessive then it is best to talk to your doctor, as putting yourself on a diet at such a young age can be dangerous and is in all likelihood totally unnecessary as your body is yet to finish filling out.

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

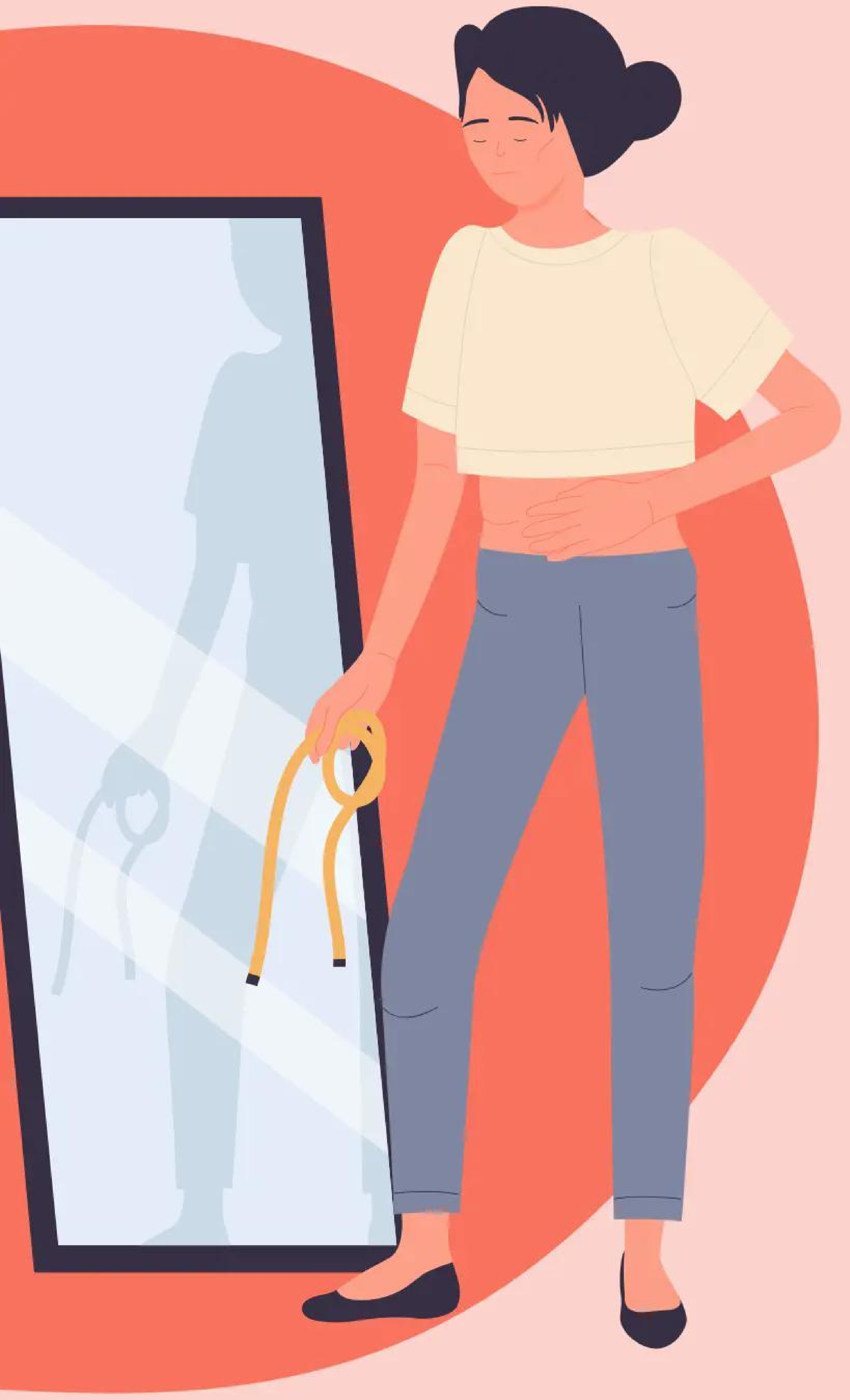
The majority of a teen's growth will be finished by the age of 15. For girls this will mean that their breasts have reached approximately their final adult shape and size (although this can change up to the age of 18), their periods begin to arrive at regular monthly intervals (a pattern that will appear between six and 24 months after the first period), their reproductive organs and genitals are fully developed and they are now at their adult height, will filled out hips, thighs and buttocks.

Boys still have a little way to go, but by 15 their genitals will be at full size, facial hair is starting to poke through and, like their female counterparts, they've stopped growing, although their muscles may yet get bigger.

Something else to be aware of (for both sexes) is body odour. Scientifically known as bromhidrosis, anybody who has undergone puberty can struggle with body odour, because by this point the apocrine sweat glands have developed, particularly in areas with lots of hair follicles. As a result, it's normal for sweat to develop on the scalp, in the armpits and around the groin. Boys tend to sweat more than girls, and consuming spicy or rich food, carrying excessive weight and some medications can make the situation worse.

As you grow you might find that you sweat more after exercise or in spells of hot weather and give off a stronger odour than before, and you may feel conscious of this around others.

Deodorants, wearing fresh underwear and socks every day and regular washing should be more than enough to keep any odours at bay, but if you do find that you are sweating a lot or your sweat takes on an unusual smell, then it's always worth talking to your doctor



> “During this time girls and boys gain a considerable amount of weight”

NURTURING THE NEW YOU

Aside from your physical wellbeing, it's also crucial to remember to take care of your mental health and not beat yourself up about the changes you are going through as your body matures. Puberty isn't just about how your body looks and feels; it's also a period in which your brain experiences massive changes as hormones flood your body, which can in turn lead to mood swings, anxiety and depression.

People often joke about how stroppy teenagers can be, and we aren't saying that puberty is a ready-made excuse to ignore your parents, refuse to do your homework or spend the day sulking because your phone's been confiscated. However, it is important that both you and your loved ones appreciate what your mind and body are going through and that you are supported in a caring and healthy way.

During adolescence the brain begins to prune unused connections and strengthen other neural links, slowly helping the brain to become more reliant on the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision making and reining in impulses. However, this process of clearing out and tidying up different pathways starts at the back, meaning that teenagers will continue to rely on their amygdala (linked to aggression, instinctive behaviour and emotions) to make decisions until their brains have finished developing, a process that may not be complete until their mid-20s and possibly even later, according to new studies.

Anxiety and depression can make an already unsettling and often confusing time in a youngster's life even harder, so it's important that communication between children and their parents is open and honest. It's also important that parents keep an eye out for the telltale signs of anxiety, which can manifest in disrupted sleep patterns, a sudden dip in academic performance or a desire to avoid certain social situations or people.

If you find that you are struggling with anything, be it the physical changes brought on by puberty or the swirl of hormones and emotions that are making navigating life tricky, talk to an adult. After all, they have been exactly where you are standing, and while everyone's problems are unique to them, the chances are that there's someone in your circle who dealt with some very similar concerns when they were younger.

Whatever stage you are at, you never need to feel alone. Your body is transforming rapidly, and it's okay to find that strange or unnerving. You won't be the first person to worry about covering up spots, whether something is the right size or if you are putting on more weight than your friends. This is all part of the journey into adulthood, and feeling awkward, unsure or troubled is a perfectly natural response. The most important thing is not to struggle in silence. It might seem like your parents or guardians are making unfair demands, expecting too much or couldn't possibly understand how you feel, but in truth they love you, have your best interests at heart and, without any doubt, they once battled with the very same emotions you're confronting now. A little guidance could go a long way to enabling you to accept and love the new you.

YOUR BODY, Yourself

A mindful approach to body positivity

The term 'body image' is in constant use around us, but what does it mean and why is it so emotionally loaded?

Our bodies affect nearly all aspects of our lives. You might think body image is purely about perception, or just what you see in the mirror. The reality is far from skin-deep. Body image is about what goes on in your mind when you see or when you imagine your body. It includes how you think about your body, how you feel about it and how you behave because of those thoughts and feelings.

A negative body image comes with distorted perception of your body. That may cause you to have adverse feelings towards yourself, such as shame or anxiety about your appearance. This is far from uncommon: some psychologists think negative body image is now 'the norm' for many people. On the other hand, a positive or healthy body image is about an accurate perception of your body. It enables you to feel satisfied with your appearance without concerns or over-investment in your body's shape or size.

Having a negative body image can affect you profoundly, not least because of how difficult it can be to challenge. This is so complex because to some extent, your own body image

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IMAGES: GETTY

> “You, and only you, should determine what the relationship between your body and your 'Self' looks like”

is formed without your conscious awareness. Your attitudes towards your body may be shaped by the way other people speak about their bodies around you. Your feelings may be influenced by how bodies are represented in art, culture and media. The way you behave towards your body may be a result of what you think is the right way to behave. Many of these complex influences on body image are internalised. They often affect us from a young age, before we have the ability, understanding or life experience to question and challenge them.

It is staggering that something as personal as your own sense of embodiment can be so strongly influenced by external factors. This is where mindfulness can help. Mindfulness is an incredibly powerful tool that you can use to shift your view of your body away from the negative and towards the neutral and positive. The key message of the body positivity movement is that you have permission to be in charge of your own body image. You, and only you, should determine what the relationship between your body and your 'self' looks like. But a healthy relationship with your own body cannot be conjured with a snap of your fingers. However, mindfulness can help you on the journey towards building awareness and connecting with your body in a positive way.

The first step towards a mindful approach to body positivity is learning to be kind to yourself. Body image and judgement are closely tangled, to the point where we judge ourselves without even realising it. There are also two sides to that judgement coin. On one hand, you may judge your body harshly because your physical appearance is not what you aspire to. On the other, you may judge yourself for struggling to be positive about your body, even though you know you should be. Mindfulness is about actively letting go of both kinds of judgement. It is not about ignoring negative thoughts and feelings, or trying to block them. It is about becoming aware of when they appear, acknowledging that they exist, recognising them for what they are and letting them go. Mindfulness can help you take a step back from the habit of negativity and self-judgement and stop you from plunging into a whirlwind of self-criticism. You can then seek to challenge negativity in multiple ways and actively focus on building positivity about yourself.

Mindfulness can also help you become more connected with your body. For example, by focusing your attention on physical sensations, such as your heartbeat and your breathing, you can shift your awareness to how you actually experience your body. You can learn to read the signals your body is sending you: that it’s comfortable, healthy, content and happy. You can wake up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment and enjoy all the remarkable things in the world around you that your body enables you to experience. Through mindfulness you can mould the relationship between your body and your Self into something that you enjoy. Being connected to your body opens up new levels of appreciation for everything it does and feels. Your body is not valuable because of how closely it corresponds to the current beauty ideal. It is not valuable because of the numbers on a weighing scale or label. It is valuable because it is the home of your Self. The care you put into your relationship with your body is care for the Self.

BE BODY *Positive*

Tips to help you on a mindful journey to body positivity

Listen to your body

Your body is constantly sending signals about what it needs. It is usually something healthy: more sleep, nutritious food or time away from the screen. The more attuned you become with your body, the better you can pick up on those signals and look after yourself.

Try out mindfulness meditation

For a few minutes each day, find a quiet spot, make yourself comfortable and focus your attention on the physical sensations in your body. From the tips of your toes to the top of your head, become aware of what it actually feels like to be in your body.

Master body neutrality

Try to perceive your body neutrally, without preconceptions of what you or anyone else thinks it should or shouldn't look like. We are so accustomed to being critical about our bodies that it can be hard to shake the habit. Dedicate time to do this as much as you need to.

Forgive yourself and take your time

Learning to be body positive is difficult. Just as with any new skill, it takes time and practice. If you find yourself slipping into old habits of thinking and behaviour, be kind to yourself. Acknowledge that this is a process, forgive yourself and move on.

Don't fall for beautiful illusions

Magazine covers, billboards and adverts are almost never a true representation of what the people in them actually look like. Remind yourself that clever image editing is a huge part of what we think of as an ideal. Don't compare yourself to a lie.

Enjoy your body

Don't let negative self-image prevent you from doing the things you want to do. Whether it's trying out a new hobby or wearing something you wouldn't normally choose to wear, remind yourself that your body belongs to you. It is yours to enjoy and experience in whatever way you decide makes you happy.

Choose to listen to positive people

When we get used to being self-critical, it can be very easy to automatically dismiss compliments, encouragement and support. Actively choose to listen to and believe the people around you who give you positive affirmation. Surround yourself with them and let their opinion matter more than negative self-image.

Learn to love what you hate

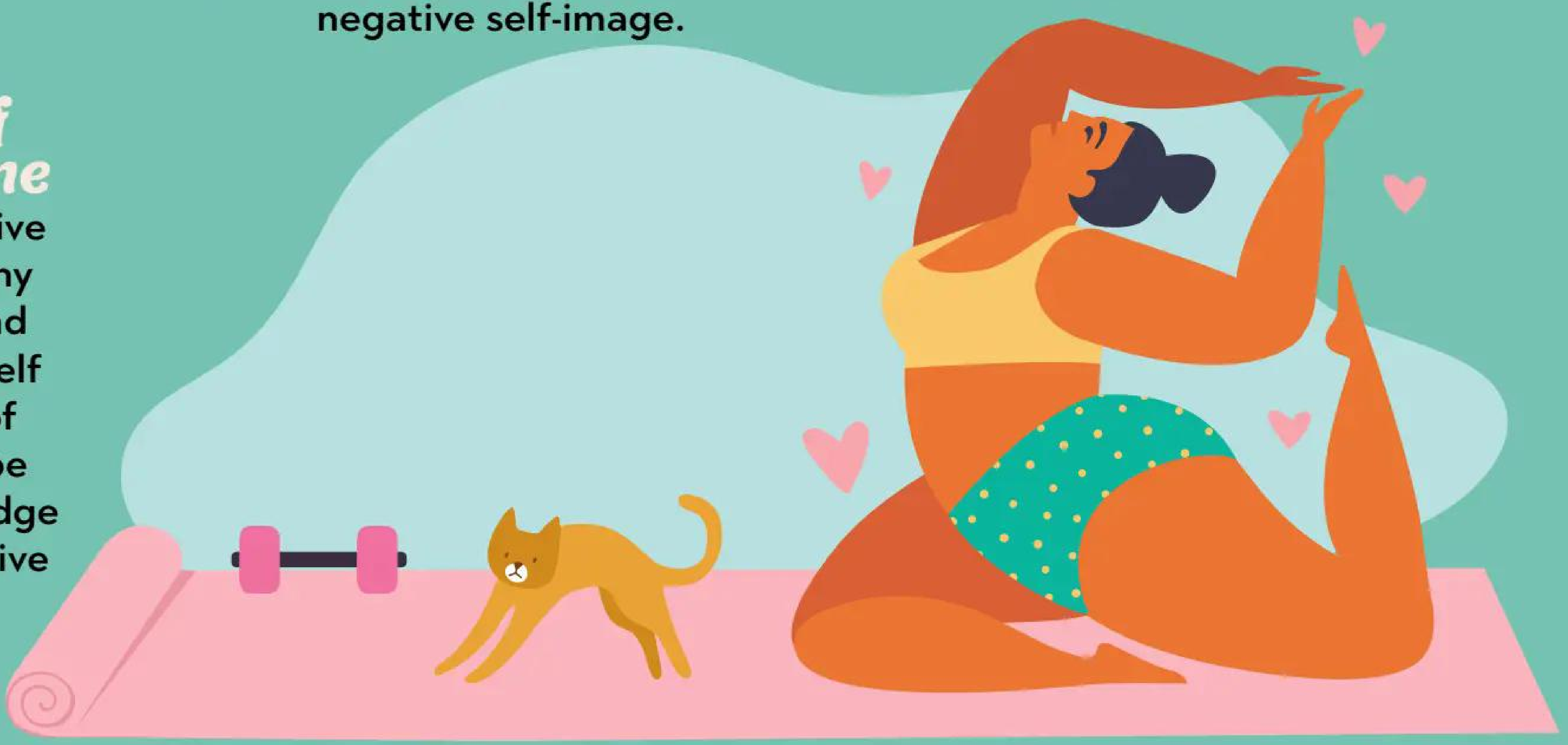
Whenever you find yourself focusing on something that you dislike about your body, counter the negative thought with a positive statement about the same thing. Write the positive statements down and carry them with you. This will help you to challenge negative thoughts if and when they appear.

Challenge the norm

If you hear someone else speak negatively and critically about their body, try and think about why they do it. Are they pursuing the 'ideal body'? Who has decided what 'ideal' looks like? Have they internalised a negative self-image? What would you tell them if they asked you for help? Can you apply this thinking to your own situation?

See your body for the amazing thing it is

Remind yourself that your body is not part of the decor. It is a remarkable ecosystem that can do amazing things, such as extracting nutrition from food and fighting infections. Appreciate everything your body is capable of and remember that none of it is to do with looks.



WHAT WE *believe* ABOUT OURSELVES

Let go of limitations and believe in your own abilities

> *"Appreciate everything your body is capable of and remember that none of it is to do with looks"*

Our belief system is formed of all our assumptions and convictions. It shapes how we perceive and experience the world, how we feel about ourselves and how we act because of those feelings. Sometimes, we hold self-limiting beliefs. These are negative convictions about ourselves that we have accepted as universal truths and which often hold us back. For example, you might believe you are never quite good enough and any little mistake you make or imperfection you have makes you a less worthy person. Because of this belief, you may put off tasks, fearing you will not be good enough. You

may avoid trying something new because of the damaging negative self-belief and not because of your actual abilities.

To challenge your self-limiting beliefs, recognise them for what they are. Be honest and objective about the extent of the belief and how it has impacted you. Replace 'am' with 'feel' (eg “I feel incapable” rather than “I am incapable”) to remind yourself these beliefs are not facts. Form empowering beliefs to replace the negative ones – these will help you move forward. For example, if you believe you are incapable of something, try to form the belief that you are able to learn. Expand your belief system so it lets you attempt something, even if you might not immediately succeed. Most importantly, be kind to yourself. We tend to judge ourselves more harshly than we would ever judge another person. Think about how you would support and encourage a friend who was struggling with negative self-beliefs and turn that positive affirmation inwards. Be your own best friend.

Write down everything that you love about yourself

Now ask a family member or best friend to write down everything that they love about you on a separate piece of paper. Were your lists different? Write down what surprised you the most.

Change your NEGATIVE BELIEFS

Tips on working through negative self-beliefs

Notice them

Negative self-beliefs can be internalised and very hard to notice or change. When you are acting because of a conviction you hold about yourself, try to step back and focus your awareness on the source of that conviction. Are you making a genuine, honest assessment of your abilities, or are you accepting something without questioning it?

Challenge them

Don’t let negative beliefs fester. Once you recognise them, try to approach them objectively and replace them with empowering beliefs. Look for evidence that runs contrary to your self-limiting beliefs and take note. You are more capable than you give yourself credit for. Raise your own awareness of that in order to chip away at the negative belief.

Turn it around

Beliefs based on plenty of evidence are more durable than those we simply acquire. Once you have challenged your negative and limiting beliefs, keep showing yourself your own capabilities. Start slowly when attempting something new and celebrate each success, no matter how small. With time and dedication, your negative self-belief will be replaced by genuine confidence in yourself.

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EATING to ease anxiety

Ensuring your body is being fuelled effectively is a great way to fend off anxious feelings

Feeling stressed and anxious can lead to appetite changes, like nausea and skipping meals, to stress snacking salty and sugary foods and binge eating Ben & Jerry's. It can be hard to consider your daily diet when you are struggling with school and growing up, but what we eat has a major effect on our emotions. For example, have you ever felt 'hangry' – hungry and angry at the same time? This feeling is caused by low blood sugar. When your blood sugar levels drop it can cause irritability, depression and tiredness. Thankfully, by being a little bit mindful over what foods you pick, you can help combat hanger and help your body fight negative feelings in general – and it's easier than you might think!

CONSIDER YOUR CARBS

Don't skip your carbs, no matter what the advice in silly magazines might say, they are essential for growing teens. Keep your blood sugar levels steady by selecting foods that release energy in your body slowly. Brown rice and pasta, wholegrain bread and cereal, and nuts and seeds are all fantastic options. Try switching from white bread, pasta and rice to the brown alternatives and see if you notice a difference.

HEALTHY HYDRATION!

What you drink is just as important as the foods you consume. When we are dehydrated it becomes harder to think clearly and make decisions. It also affects our ability to concentrate.

Water is always the best option for rehydration, try adding a sugar-free cordial to help you enjoy drinking more of it. Caffeine, a stimulant found in energy drinks, tea, coffee, soft drinks and chocolate (among other things), can often give you a burst of energy, but it can also dehydrate you and if it's not consumed in moderation,

WRITTEN BY: BEE GINGER. IMAGES: GETTY

it can cause headaches, depression, anxiety and sleep disturbance, especially if you drink it late in the day or before bedtime. So, try and avoid having more than a couple of cups of tea, coffee or glasses of soft drink in one day.

GET FRUITY!

Fruit and vegetables contain a wide range of vitamins, minerals and nutrients that can help with both your physical and mental health. Many contain Vitamin C, which is vital to maintaining healthy brain function and essential for overall good health. Even dried, tinned or frozen fruit and vegetables can count towards your five a day.

Fruit juices and smoothies might seem healthy but they can often contain high levels of hidden sugars. Studies have also shown that when you blend fruit, it loses some of the fibre that helps slow down the body's conversion of food sugars to blood sugars, meaning smoothies provide a shorter boost of energy than if you consumed the fruit in its natural state. However, if you struggle to get enough fruit and veg into your diet, making one smoothie at home for a yummy breakfast boost is still a good idea.

POSITIVE PROTEINS

Proteins are another essential. They contain chemicals called amino acids, and your brain needs these to produce neurotransmitters. These are the chemicals that get the nerve cells throughout your body to communicate, and they enable the brain to perform several key tasks. You can find good sources of protein in many foods like beans, lentils, soya products, milk, fish, eggs, nuts and seeds, lean meat and cheese. Fatty acids like omega-3 and omega-6, which are found in oily fish, seeds, nuts and avocados, are another critical ingredient for a healthy brain and can adequately regulate your feelings and emotions.

MUST-HAVE MINERALS

Speaking of keeping things ticking over, when it comes to calming your nervous system and managing stress responses, magnesium is a must. Magnesium is also helpful for females, as it can help with premenstrual syndrome.

There are also many vitamins that play an important part in reducing stress. Vitamin D and B vitamins, especially vitamin B12, vitamin B6, folate (vitamin B9) and iron each offer something in the battle to keep anxiety at bay. These minerals particularly benefit females, as you can lose large amounts of iron and other vitamins when you menstruate, causing you to feel exhausted. Low iron is also directly linked to feelings of depression and anxiety, and having low energy levels can lead to feeling overwhelmed and being unable to manage your thoughts and feelings.

Many vitamins and minerals can be taken as a supplement, but we advise first speaking with a healthcare specialist to see what vitamins you might benefit from the most and which ones you might be lacking. Vegetarians and vegans can find it more difficult to consume enough B vitamins and vitamin D as they are mostly found in animal-based foods such as fish, meat and dairy products. So if you are following a vegan diet you will need to ensure you add foods fortified with these vitamins to your diet.

Minerals for mental health

These vitamins and minerals can help keep your anxiety at bay, but where are the best places to find them?

MAGNESIUM
Found in:
- Dark chocolate
- Spinach
- Whole wheat
- Almonds
- Cashews
- Black beans

VITAMIN D
Found in:
- Oily fish
- The Sun – so make sure you find time to go out and soak up some rays!

B VITAMINS
Found in:
- Marmite and Vegemite
- Eggs
- Mushrooms
- Nuts
- Chicken
- Peas

L-THEANINE
Found in:
- Green and black tea

IRON
Found in:
- Red meat
- Shellfish
- Spinach
- Legumes (kidney beans, edamame beans and chickpeas)
- Mushrooms
- Quinoa

ZINC
Found in:
- Shellfish
- Red meat
- Eggs
- Pomegranate
- Lentils
- Pumpkin seeds

CALCIUM
Found in:
- Milk
- Cheese
- Salmon
- Kale
- Soybeans

MOVE FOR YOUR *mind*

Give your body a workout to help clear your mind, boost your brain and even induce sleep!

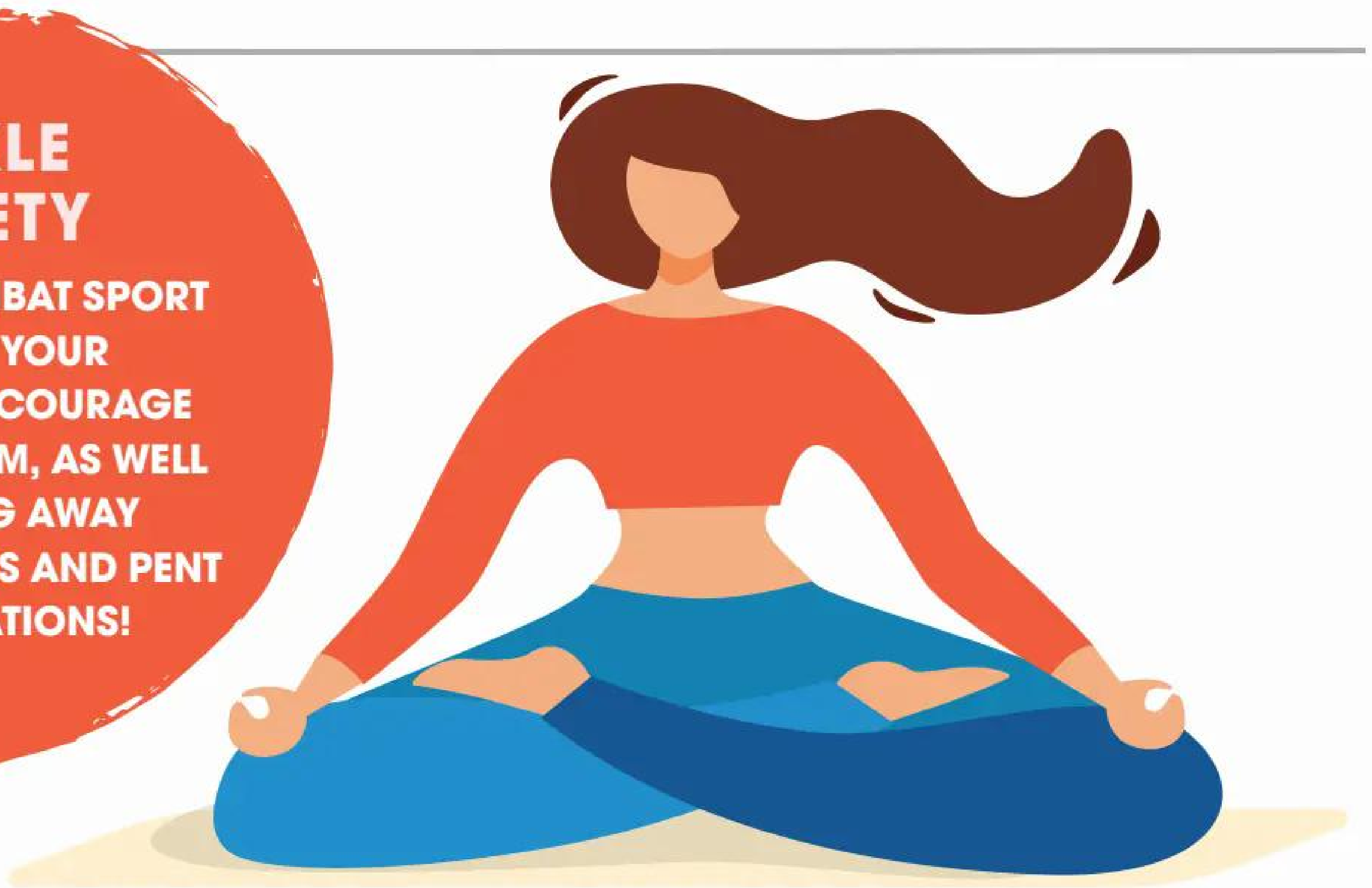
Exercising can be a great way to help you cope with feelings of anxiety. Whether you do it alone, with a friend or in a group, getting your heart pumping spells good news for your mental health. This is because physical activity releases endorphins – hormones that are linked to pleasure, pain relief, stress reduction and an enhanced sense of wellbeing. Moving your body also decreases muscle tension, which in itself lowers an overall feeling of anxiety. Plus, when your heart rate increases during more vigorous aerobic exercise, it triggers a change in brain chemistry to boost the levels of several anti-anxiety chemicals, such as serotonin. On top of this, it also gives your mind a chance to focus on something that isn't the cause of your concern and divert your energy into something productive. You don't have to do much, just one hour every day should ideally be spent doing some form of movement. If you aren't a team sports type of person, here are a few examples of healthy activities that will really benefit you.

DANCING

Okay, so this might not be your first thought when embarking on some exercise, but you can do it at home or in an outside space, you could even join a group and make new friends. It's creative, expressive, fun and challenges your brain. It raises the heart rate and focusing on a routine provides distraction from your worries, making it a great physical and mental workout!

TACKLE ANXIETY

TRY OUT A COMBAT SPORT TO BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE, COURAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM, AS WELL AS BLASTING AWAY EVERYDAY STRESS AND PENT UP FRUSTRATIONS!



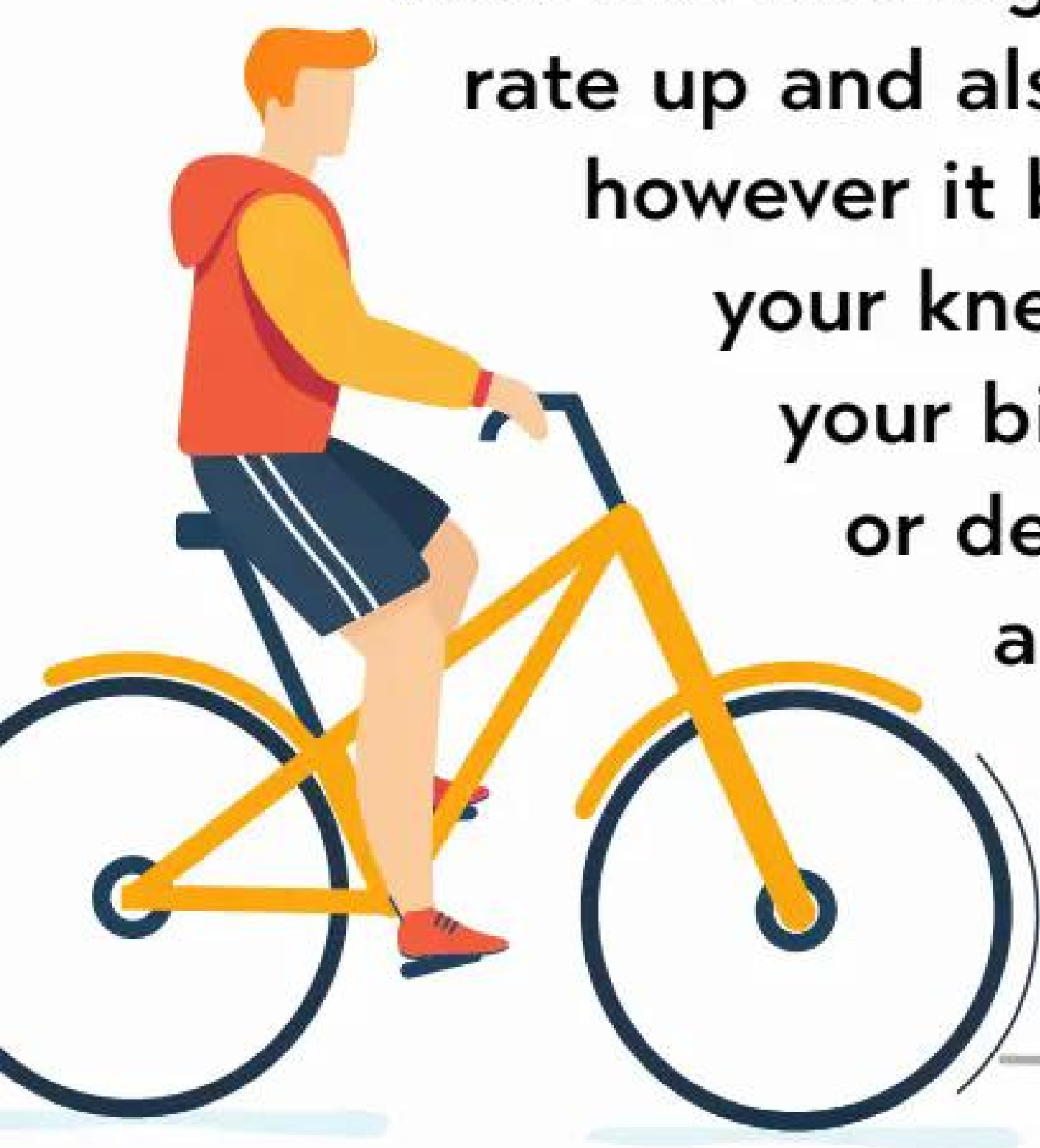
YOGA

Yoga combines controlled breathing with meditation and cardiovascular exercises to boost and improve your physical health and mental clarity. You can join a group or do it at home. There are numerous online sessions and videos, so you can choose which exercises suit you (plus nobody will know if you have fallen asleep). Get started with yoga on the next pages.

RUNNING

Running is a tried and tested way to clear your mind and stop you from focusing on what is stressing you out, which in turn reduces your stress levels. It is also an easy way to trigger your body to release mood-boosting chemicals and give you an increased feeling of happiness. However, if you aren't naturally attuned to it, it can be tough to get going – so begin slowly, easing yourself into it, and check out our guide on page 50 to get started.

CYCLING



Just like running, cycling can help you get your heart rate up and also get you outside into the fresh air, however it benefits from having a lower impact on your knees and ankles. Whether you just jump on your bike and take it for a spin around the park or devote yourself to a spin class, cycling is a great way to take your mind off your worries and get your heart pumping so you feel that all-important 'high'!

SWIMMING

Swimming is excellent for helping you to breathe deeply, calming the nervous system. Water itself has a soothing effect on the mind, and while swimming is a gentle, low-impact exercise – making it ideal if you suffer from any injuries or mobility issues – it still improves fitness levels, aids flexibility and helps to release those essential happy hormones.

WALKING

Just getting out into the fresh air can be hugely beneficial. Walking (or hiking if you are brave and want to take it up a notch!) increases blood flow and circulation, calming the nervous system and reducing stress. Just 20 minutes a day can drastically improve your physical and mental health. Take the opportunity to breathe deeply and observe the nature and environment around you, this can be a mood booster in itself!

GETTING STARTED AT THE GYM

Going to the gym doesn't need to add to your anxieties

Joining a gym is a wonderful way to keep to your fitness routine, try out new exercises and make new friends. But many of us feel self-conscious about going to the gym, whatever our fitness level or body type. Take comfort in the fact that because everybody is so concerned about their own body and concentrating on their own workout, there is no way they are looking at you or judging you. Everyone sweats, everyone pulls funny faces and absolutely nobody looks or smells great when they leave a good workout – if they do, they aren't doing it properly!

While the gym can be a daunting place for all ages, particularly if you aren't a sporty type, if you follow these tips, you'll find yourself a regular gym bunny in no time!

BOOK AN INDUCTION

It's important to know what you are doing when you work out. Having a gym induction will give you confidence, mean you get to know an instructor at your gym and ensure you are using equipment effectively and safely.

TRY A CLASS

Classes can be an excellent way to encourage you to exercise, as well as meet people. They also offer guidance, so if you have no clue what you are doing, all you need to do is take cues from the instructor. What's more, many classes are fun and classmates are often very supportive.

BRING A BUDDY

If you are anxious about starting at the gym or going to a class for the first time, take a partner. That could be a friend, parent or other family member. Once you've experienced it once, you will know exactly what to expect and you might find the confidence to go on your own.

TAKE HEADPHONES

Headphones are a must at the gym. Music not only helps you relax and find mindfulness, but it can be an excellent motivator. It distracts you from all the noise in the gym (such as chatter, music, and clanging weights) and helps you to focus on what you are doing, rather than anyone else.

WRITTEN BY: ALICE PATILLO & LAUREN SCOTT. IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES

ESSENTIAL yoga POSES FOR BEGINNERS

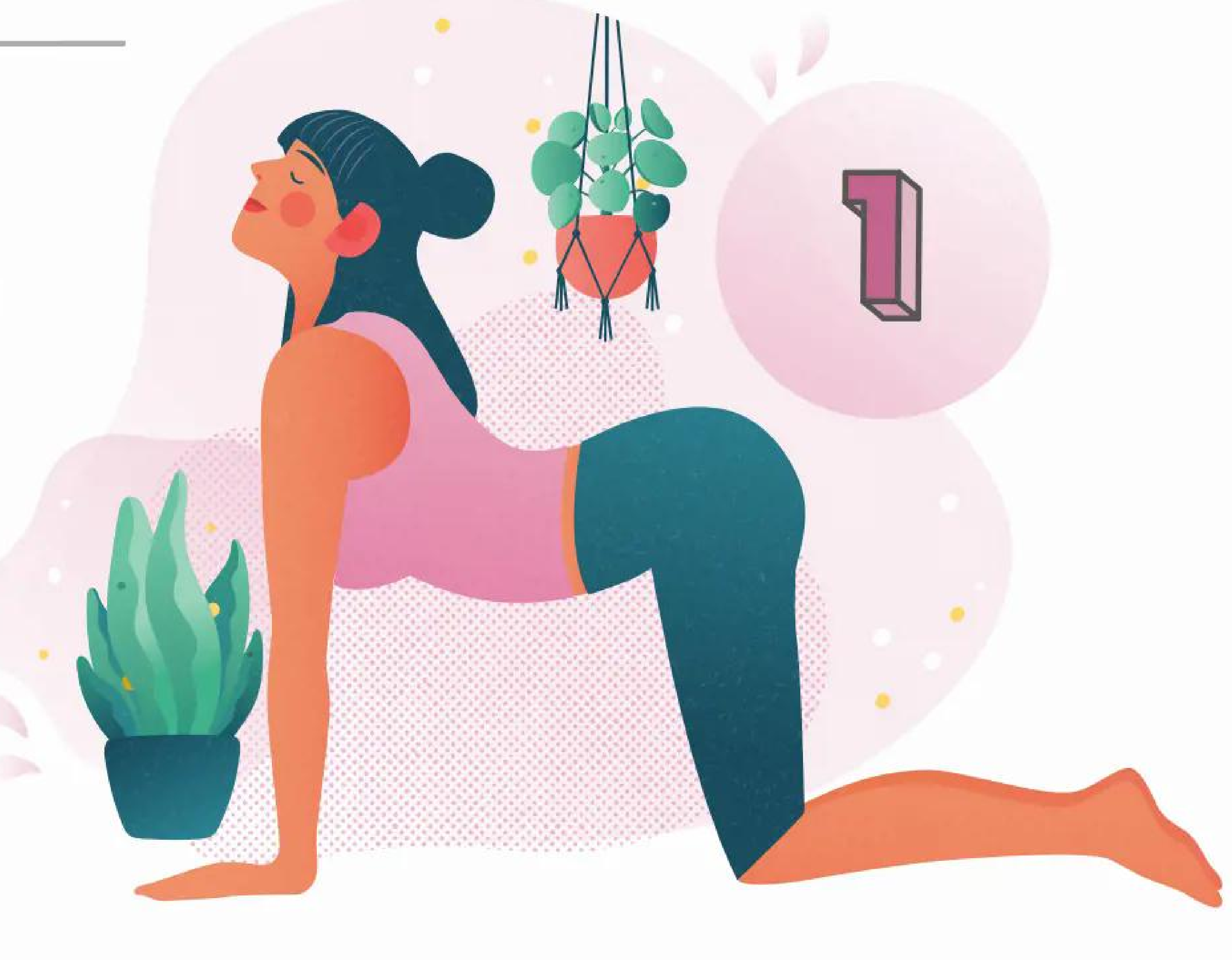
Discover how to build strength, flexibility and mental wellbeing with this ancient form of movement

Yoga is thought to be over 5,000 years old, originating in India. It has, in the past, suffered from a reputation as being an exercise only accessible to the more flexible among us and those of a hippy persuasion. However, yoga is in fact an endlessly adaptable and inclusive form of exercise, making it suitable for people of all ages, shapes and abilities. Thankfully it is far more widely understood these days, especially with the introduction of modified versions of yoga – such as chair/seated yoga – proving that anyone can get involved.

Yoga counts as one of your two recommended weekly strength sessions to help keep your muscles strong. It also helps you to improve your flexibility, balance and co-ordination. Although all of this is obviously very important, yoga does have another trick up its sleeve. Because of its attention to breathing, posture and stillness, yoga is a mindful form of exercise. There is also some evidence that shows it can help to reduce stress and anxiety and be used to manage back or muscle pain. With all of these advantages, it is definitely worth making yoga part of your fitness regime, and here we take a look at some of the best poses to get you started.

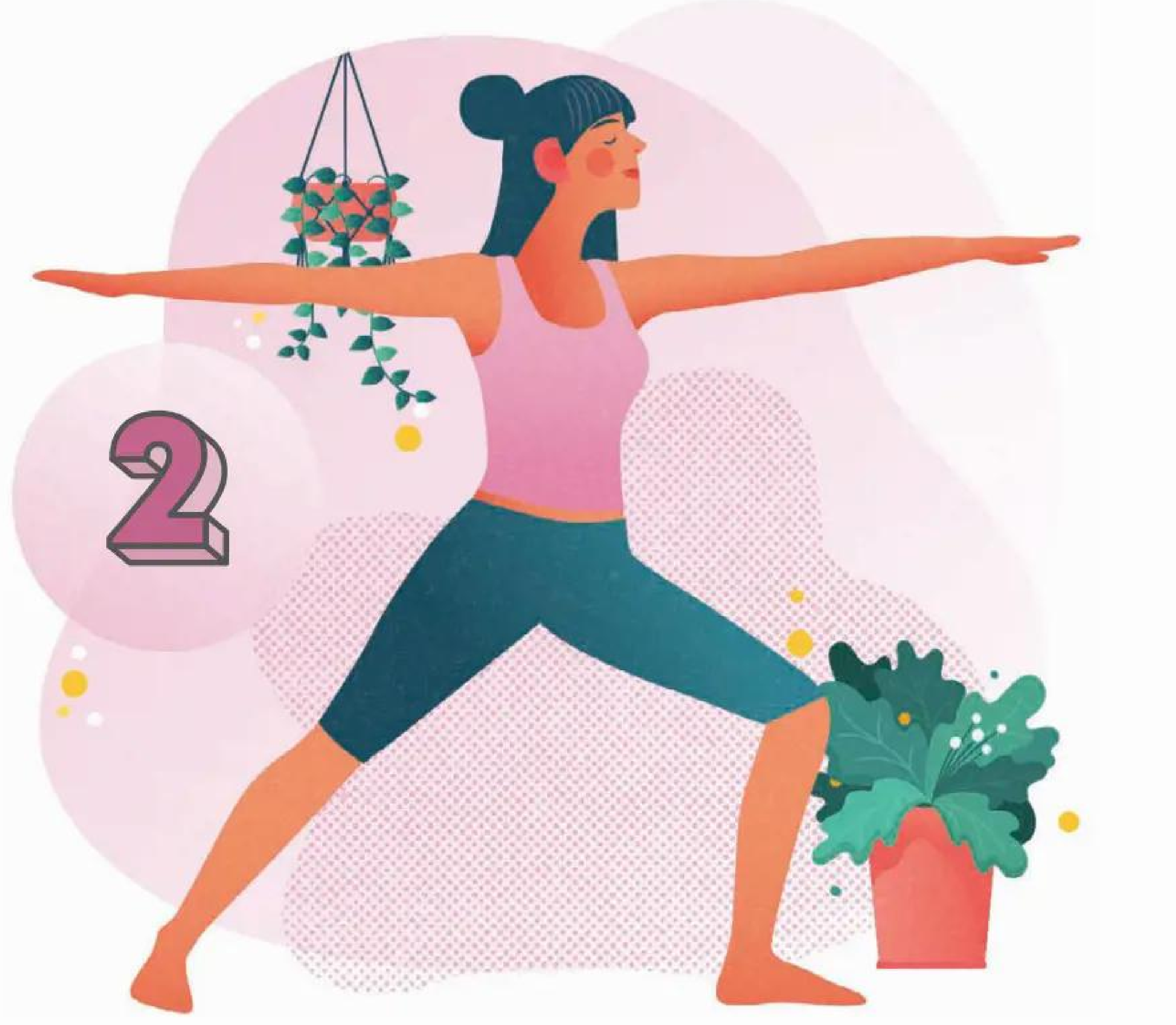
CAT/COW POSE

Cat/Cow is a basic pose with a wide range of benefits. You start on your hands and knees, with wrists under your shoulders and knees under your hips, lining up at 90-degree angles. As you breathe in, you turn your head towards the sky and open the chest, creating a curve in your spine. This is the Cow part of the pose. When you breathe out, you round your spine, pulling your head towards your navel – this is the Cat form of the pose. This is a great stretch for the back and hips, as well as strengthening the muscles in the spine and neck. It's a good pose for mornings, to release any tension built up from lying in bed at night. For women, it can also help alleviate pain associated with menstrual cramps.



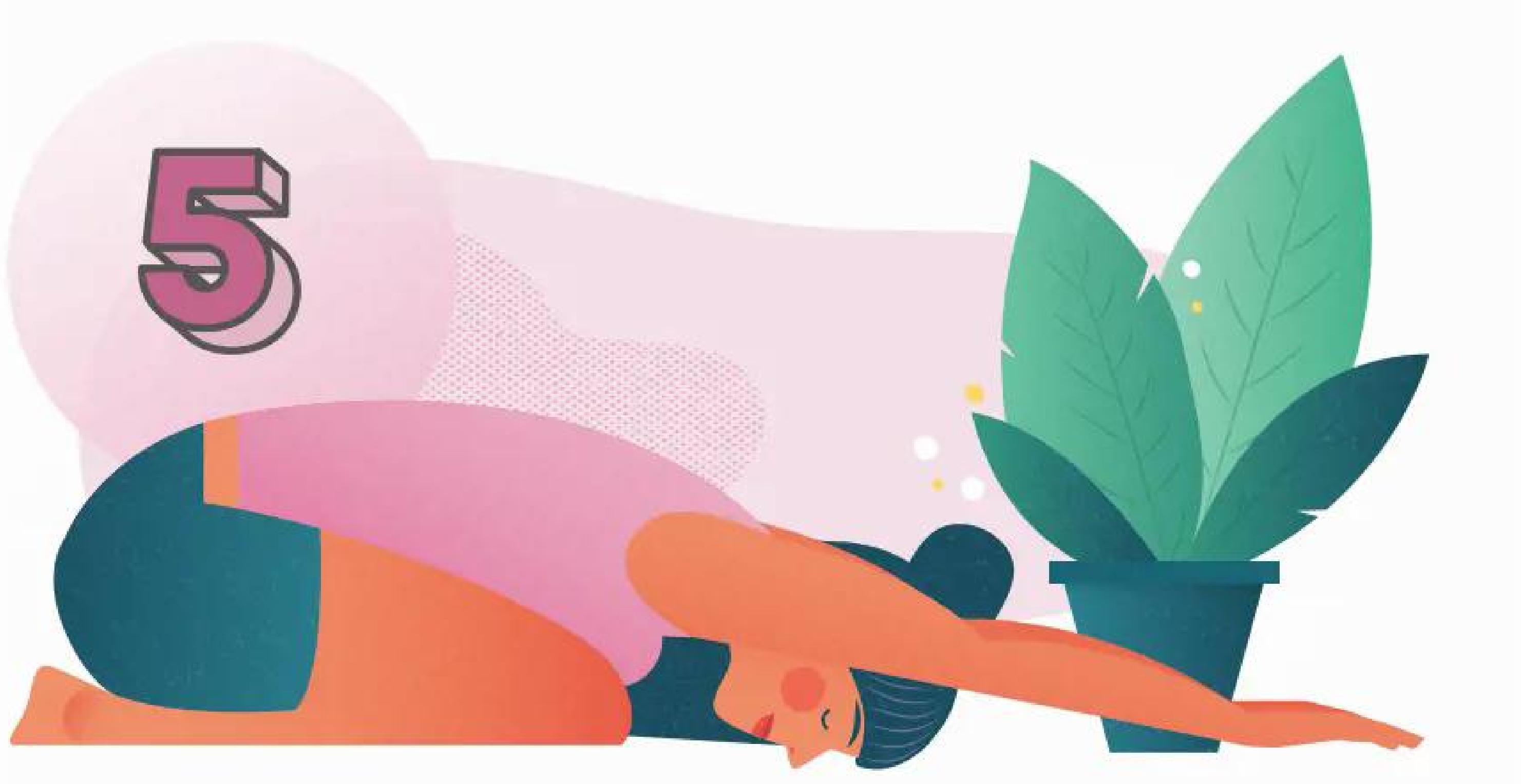
WARRIOR II POSE

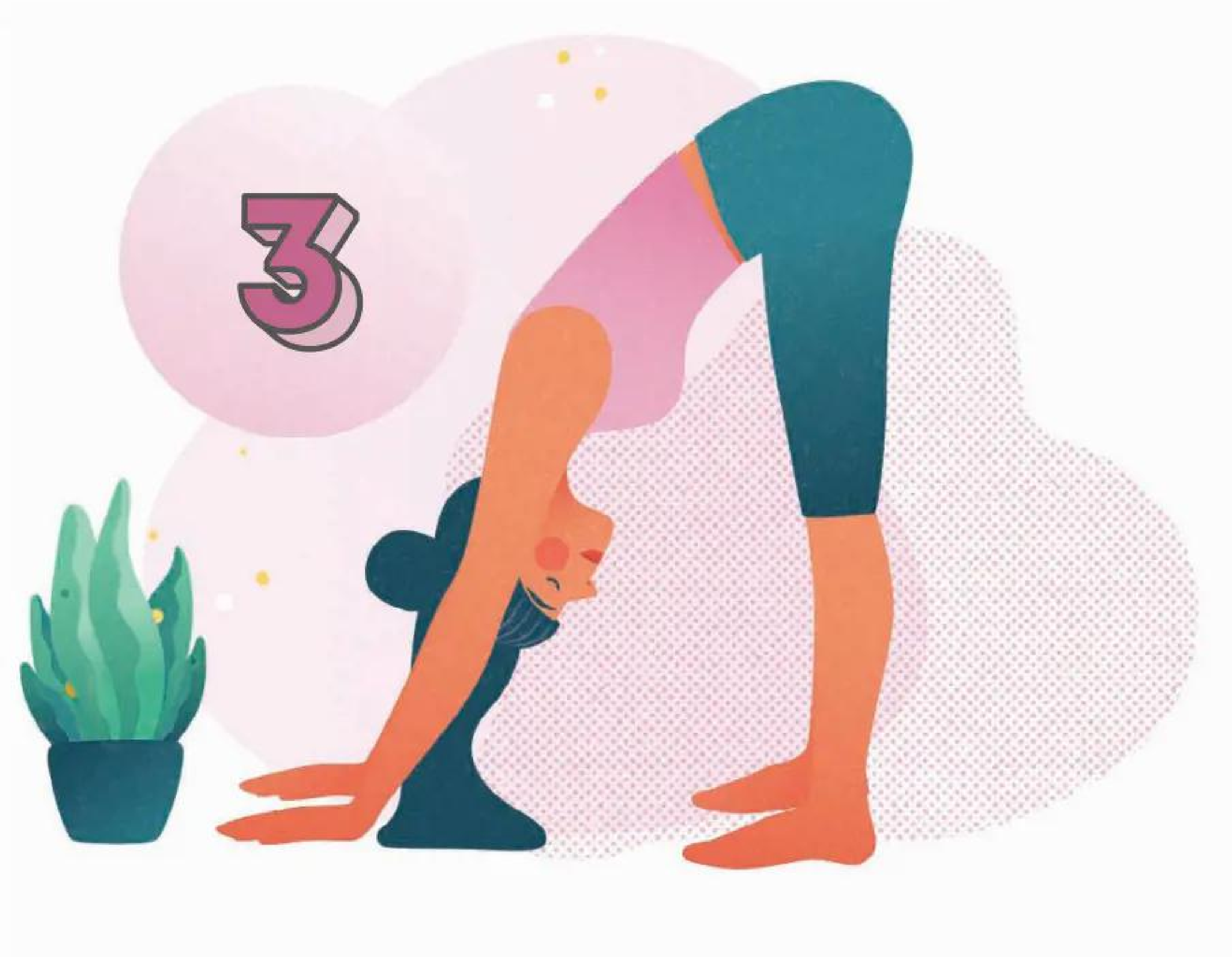
The Warrior poses help to build standing leg strength. These are also strong poses that can boost mental wellbeing by creating feelings of empowerment. Warrior II targets the hips, inner thighs and groin areas, opening them all up in a powerful full-body pose. Stand with your feet wide apart. Start with your right foot and turn it 90 degrees to the right. Your left foot should turn about 45 degrees to the right. The heel of your right foot should be in line with the side arch of your left foot. Bend your knee towards the right foot so that your knee sits directly over your ankle, but keep your core centred between both feet. Stretch your arms out to both sides, and look forward towards your right foot. Repeat on the left side.



CHILD'S POSE

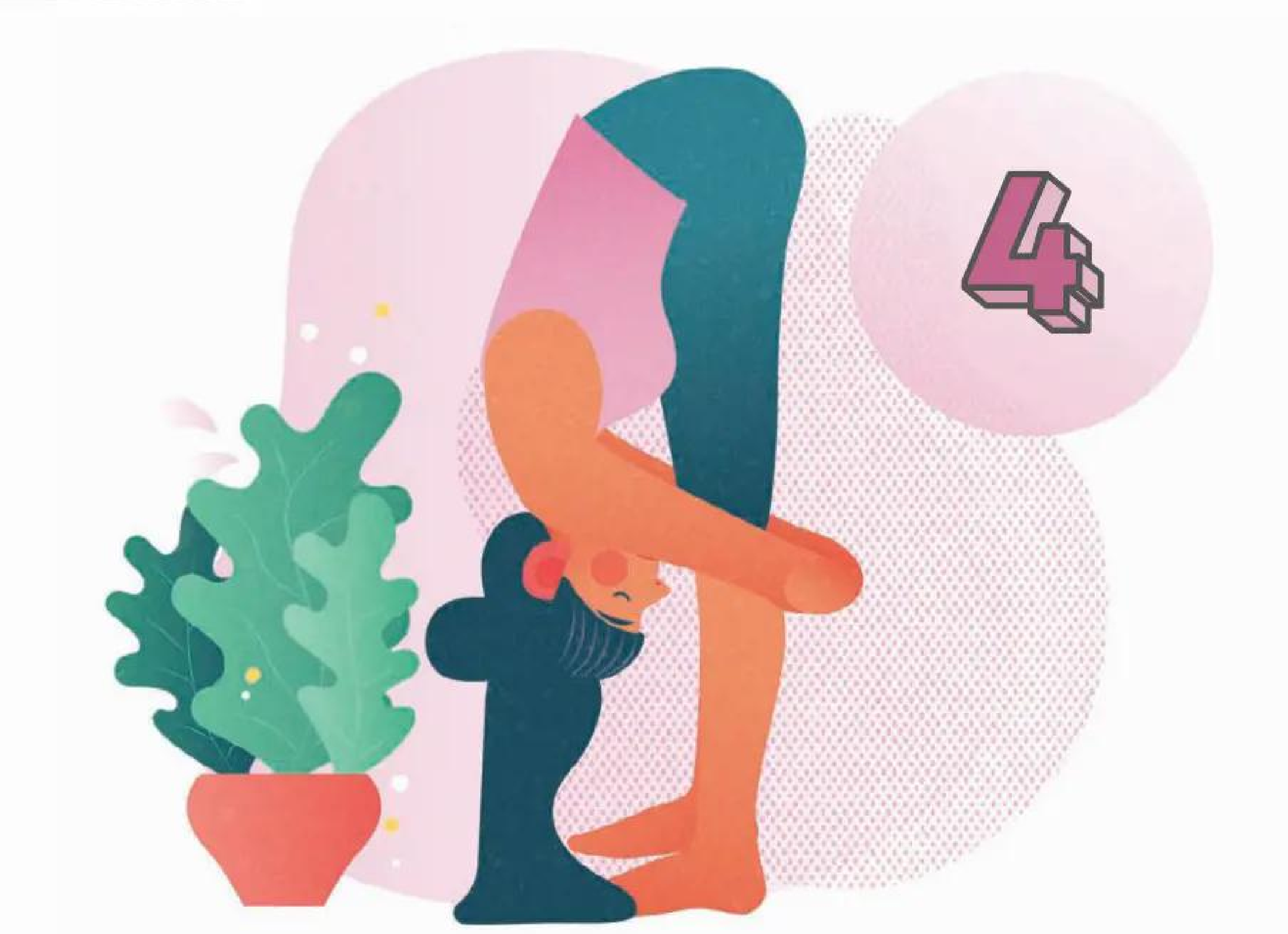
This is a very simple, relaxing pose and is often used in yoga as a rest pose to release muscles in between the more intense poses. But it's also a powerful pose in its own right and can be a great way to start or end the day. Kneel down and tip forward, bringing your arms in front of you, forehead to the floor and push your chest down. Keep your bottom pushing towards your heels and lengthen through your spine. Take deep breaths as you sink into the pose and hold. This can help to release tension in the body, as well as help your back to stay strong and flexible.





DOWNWARD-FACING DOG

This is one of the most common yoga poses, thanks to its full-body strengthening ability. Starting on all fours, with wrists under your shoulders and knees under your hips, lift your knees up and push your hips towards the sky. Your hands should be firm to the ground. Push your chest and head between your arms, and keep your core tight. You may have to bend your knees if your hamstrings are tight and your heels can lift off the ground when you first start. You're aiming to create straight lines and form a triangle.



STANDING FORWARD BEND

Start in a standing position, with feet firmly planted hip-width apart. Draw your spine to its full length, then bend forwards, hinging at the hips. With each breath try to relax the neck and shoulders. Your hands can hang, grasp your ankles or lightly touch the floor for support. Your knees should be bent as much as you need for comfort, and you can start to work on straightening them over time. This Forward Bend pose helps the hamstrings, relieving tension and creating length in your body. If you can't invert your head in this way, try a Seated Forward Bend instead, with your legs out in front of you as you sit on the floor, and hinging from the hips towards your feet.

IMAGES: GETTY

5 TOP TIPS TO START Running

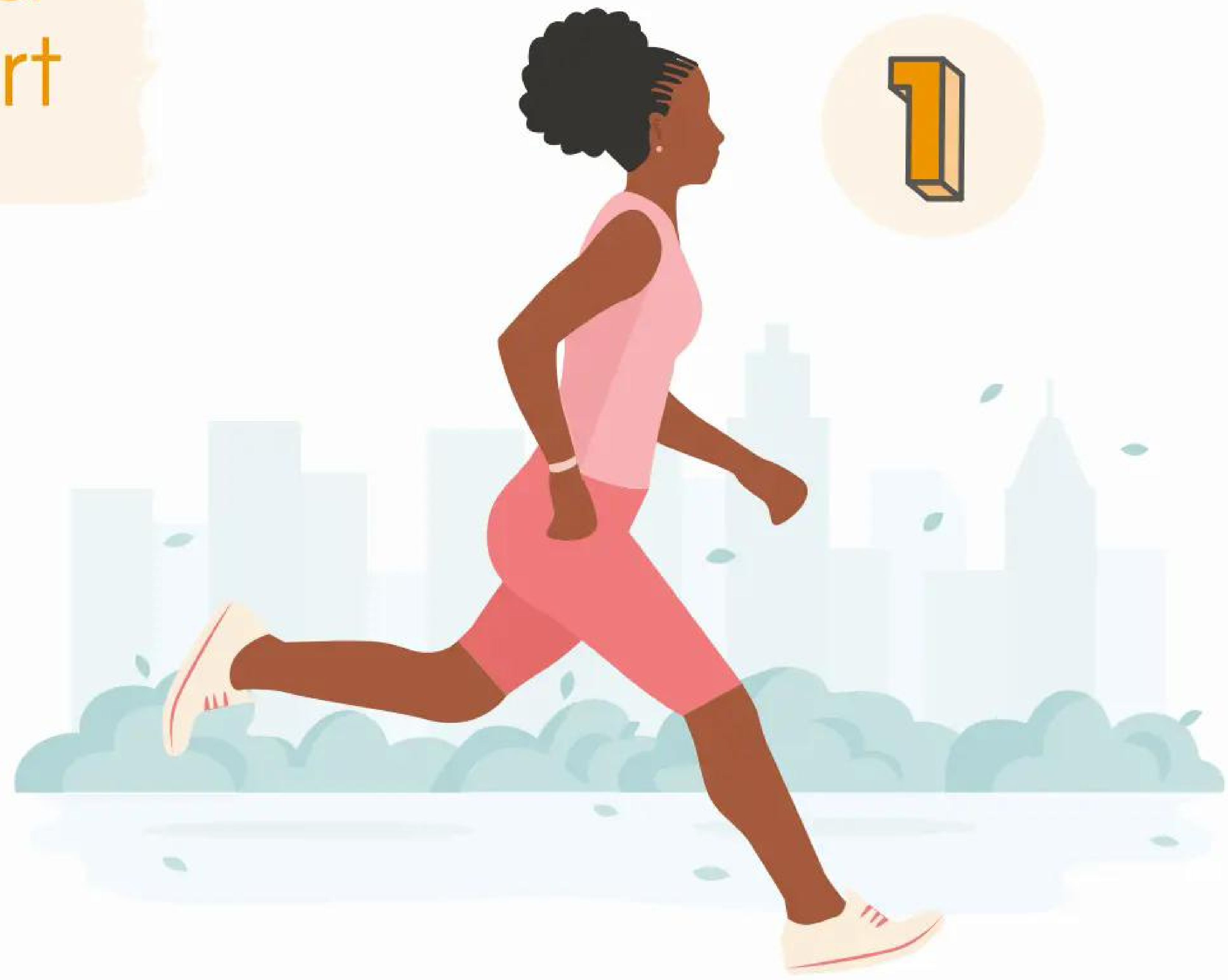
Join the running revolution and reap the physical and mental benefits of this sport

The great thing about running is that, at its most basic level, it's simple and cheap to get started. All you need is some well-fitting trainers, sports kit and a can-do mindset.

Running is growing in popularity every year. The TCS London Marathon and the AJ Bell Great North Run are both televised events that inspire and motivate hundreds of viewers to try running for themselves – the fact that both these events require entering a ballot and are hugely oversubscribed is testament to the fact that running is a sport with wide appeal. Then there's parkrun (**parkrun.org.uk**), an amazing venture where you turn up to your local event (there are hundreds that take place around the country) on a Saturday morning and run, walk or jog the 5K course with absolutely no pressure, for free.

Running is a great cardio activity to build strength, stamina and endurance. It can help you achieve or maintain a healthy weight, and it can boost your heart health. It's also linked to improved mental wellbeing, and can be beneficial to those with depression or anxiety. Here's how to get started...

1



START SMALL

Running too much too soon can lead to injury, and this can often put people off the sport. Make sure you start slowly when it comes to running. Begin by alternating running and walking – for example, run for one minute, walk for one minute and repeat for 20 minutes. You should always start with a short warm-up before you begin running, and gently stretch at the end (more on this later). Consider following a structured programme like Couch to 5K (there are a couple of apps available that are broadly the same), which builds you up carefully week by week and therefore reduces your chance of getting injured.

2

INVEST IN DECENT TRAINERS

You don't need a lot of kit to start running, but it's important to think about what you are putting on your feet. A lot of injuries can occur because you are wearing trainers that don't support your feet properly as you run. It's worth going to a running shop and asking for their advice. They will often look at how you run and recommend the right type of shoe for your feet. This can help to prevent injury and prevent uncomfortable blisters. Tell the advisor your budget before you start, as running shoes can be quite pricey for higher-end models. Consider some proper running socks, too.

4

SET MINI GOALS

Think about what you want to achieve with your running. For some people, it's about gaining fitness, for others it's improving their mental health and for others it might be about losing weight. Whatever your personal reasons, it's a good idea to set yourself some goals to achieve along the way. Track your progress using a running app or writing in a notepad. This will enable you to look back over how far you have come. You can also decide on rewards along the way. For example, the first time you run 20 minutes without stopping, you could treat yourself to a new running top. Then you can move on to the next mini goal to keep you on track.

3

FIND A RUNNING BUDDY

It's much easier to motivate yourself to go for a run if you're meeting a friend. Having someone to talk to while you run helps the time go quicker. It's also nice to have someone to share experiences with. You could also run with someone more experienced, who can answer any questions you might have or give you some practical advice. If you don't have anyone to run with, consider looking for a club or running course in your area, where you can connect with like-minded people and commit to sticking with running for the long term. Many running clubs will have a beginners' session or a Couch to 5K-style course to build you up from scratch.

5

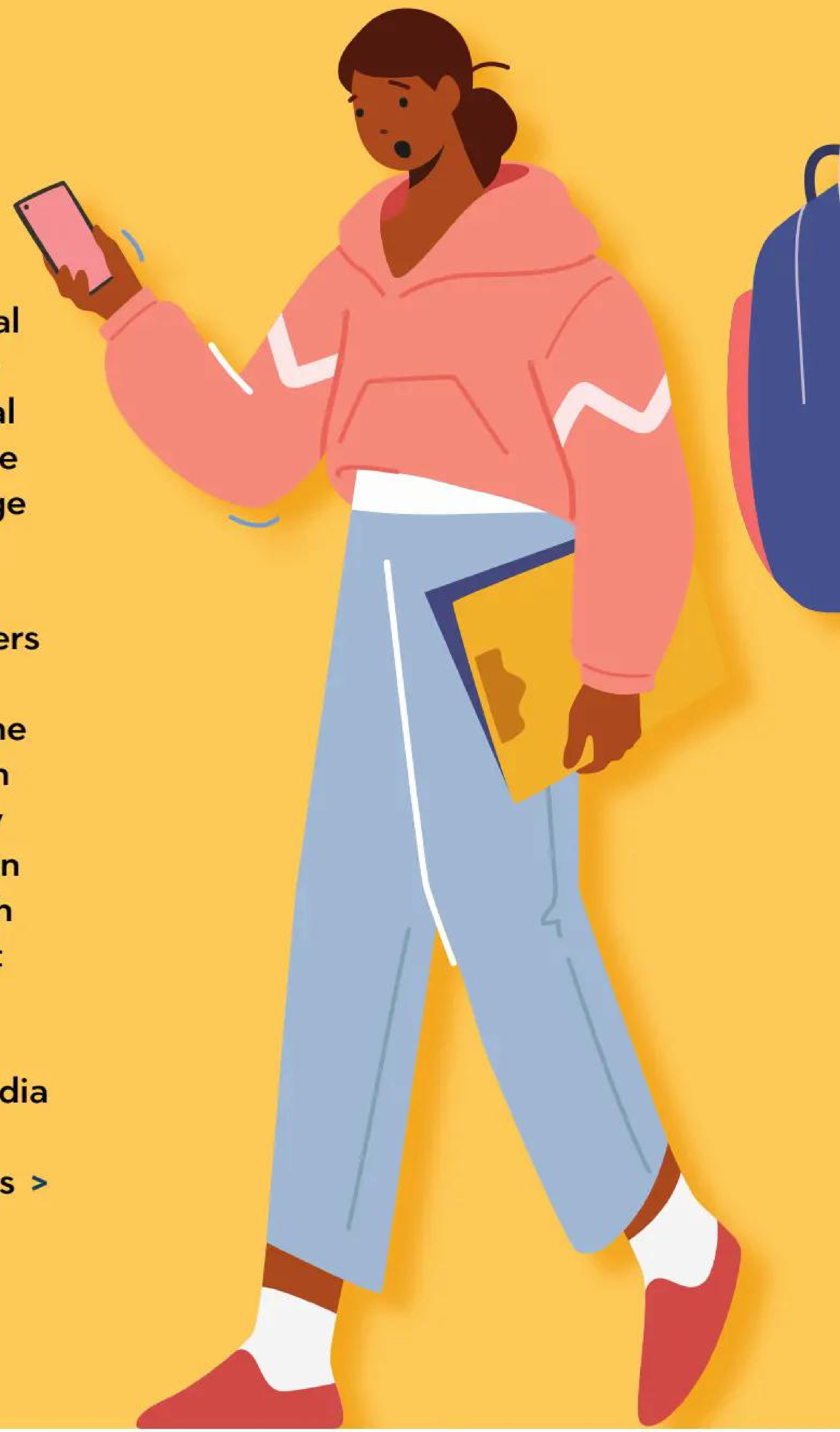
LEARN TO STRETCH PROPERLY

A common cause of injuries is not stretching after you run. Even when you first start out and even if you are doing more walking than running, getting into the habit of stretching for a few minutes after a run will do you the world of good. Make sure that you stretch through your main leg muscles: calves, thighs, hamstrings and quads. You should also stretch your arms and shoulders (where many runners hold a lot of tension), hips and glutes. A full stretch routine doesn't have to take long, but it should absolutely be considered an essential part of each running session.

IMAGES: GETTY

Living in a SOCIAL-MEDIA World

It's an always-on, switched-on, connected-up world – so why are teens feeling lonelier and more anxious than ever?



Think back to November 2020. You probably don't want to because it was a dark time. We were nine months into COVID-19 restrictions. Schools had been closed for months. You weren't allowed to see friends in person. It was boring, miserable – and lonely as hell. In fact, surveys have shown that young people suffered particularly badly from feelings of loneliness and anxiety during the pandemic and the government response to it. Roughly half of surveyed teenagers said that they felt lonely or very lonely during the lockdowns. And all of this was despite the use of social media.

It's easy to pick holes in social media and pitch it as a cesspool of hate. But it shouldn't be forgotten that it can also be incredibly helpful, offering an easy way to find like-minded souls. You just need to know how to use it.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS NEW

It's hard to believe that the first social media app, Facebook, only started in 2004. In less than 20 years, new social media has totally transformed how we behave and communicate. This change has been greatest among teenagers, with use of one or more of the platforms almost universal. Researchers are struggling to keep up with the change and the effect it is having. The results of studies are conflicting, with some showing social media as deeply damaging while others find that it can be helpful. This is not surprising. With such huge variety among teens, what will help one will harm another while leaving a third unaffected.

Some studies report that social media allows teens to feel more connected and more supported in the challenges >

FOLLOW
#
SHARE
CHAT
?
!
@

What’s up and what’s down

The most popular and the least popular social media apps for teens

This is the countdown of the most popular social media apps for children and teenagers in 2023 in the UK according to OFCOM, the official regulator of communications.

1. At number 1 is **YouTube**, with 88 per cent of children and teenagers using it.
2. **WhatsApp**. The message sharing app comes in a surprising second, with 55 per cent of teenagers using it for messaging and sharing.
3. **TikTok**. Just behind WhatsApp, TikTok claims over half of teens as users, with 53 per cent.
4. **Snapchat**. 46 per cent of children and teens use the photo sharing service.
5. **Instagram** attracts 41 per cent of the cohort, mainly among teenagers.
6. **Facebook**. Continuing its slow decline among teens, Facebook was used by 34 per cent of them, down from 40 per cent previously.

they face. And it’s true. Because the reach of social media is so wide, it is always possible to find someone who is dealing with the same issues that you are. But other studies have shown social media can have long-term effects on anxiety and mental health. A four-year report on a group of teens measured their anxiety and mental health through this time and found that those who used social media the most suffered more from anxiety and depression, with these feelings increasing with the amount of time they spent on social media.

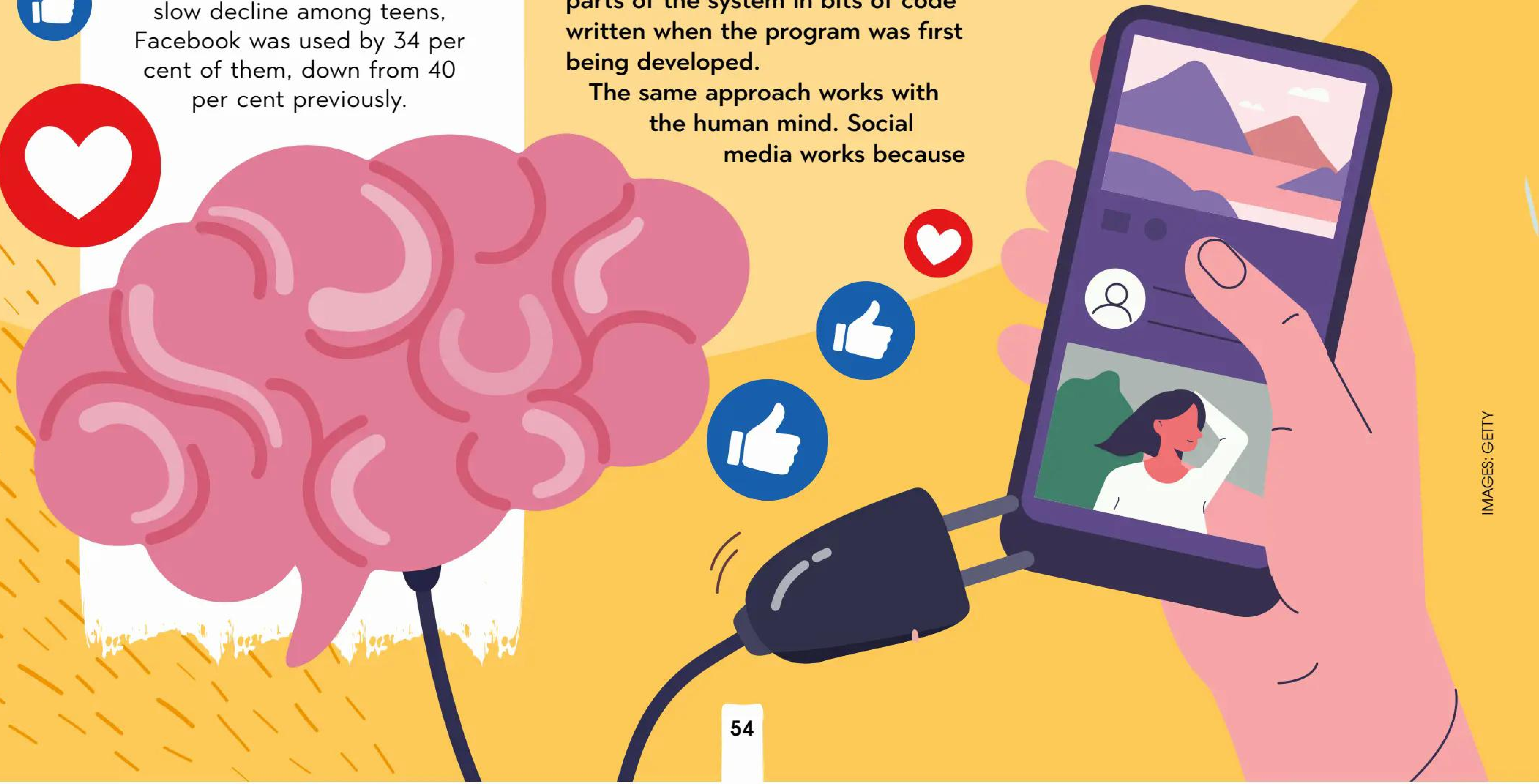
> “It is always possible to find someone dealing with the same issues”

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS SO POPULAR

To understand why social media has taken over the world, we need to understand how it appeals to so many people. To do so, think of computer hackers. Hackers look for a weakness to get into a computer system. They usually find this weakness in the oldest and deepest parts of the system in bits of code written when the program was first being developed.

The same approach works with the human mind. Social media works because it hacks into the deepest and oldest parts of our minds, the bits wired in before we even became human: status and power, love and fear. We are social because we had to be to survive. When we were roaming the African savanna, to be excluded from the tribe was a death sentence. We are acutely, exquisitely aware of social signals and social status – and at no time more so than during our teenage years. Likes, follows, reactions, comments: all of these are markers of social status. Every social media produces hierarchies and communities because that’s what every group of people does.

But add to this the unique way that social media keeps us coming back for more. In the 20th century, psychologists discovered that the most effective way to condition someone to do something was through intermittent reinforcement. Suppose a dog learns that if it pushes a lever it will receive a reward. The dog will continue pushing it until it has had enough and then it will stop,



IMAGES: GETTY

only pushing the lever when it is hungry again. But if the reinforcement is changed so that the dog only receives the reward at random intervals, then it will keep pushing the lever for much longer and also return to it sooner.

This is exactly how social media works. You post a picture on Instagram or a video on TikTok and then you wait for the reactions. Sometimes the responses come flooding in, sometimes there's a yawning void – and you never know which it is going to be. This is a pure example of intermittent reinforcement and it is working on our feelings of social inclusion or exclusion. No wonder social media is so powerful – it's designed to be. (The same sort of feedback loop of intermittent reinforcement also works in video game design.)

The feedback loop for social media is the same as gambling. Sometimes you lose, sometimes you break even, occasionally you hit the jackpot. We all know how gambling can become an addiction, wrecking lives. To make sure social media doesn't do the same to you, look at the healthy ways to use social media highlighted in this article.

Challenges good & bad

Everyone else is doing this challenge, do I have to do it as well?

Social media challenges spring up, become the rage, then die away as quickly as they appeared. Most are harmless, some are fun, some… well, some have left people injured, disabled or even dead. But when everyone else seems to be doing it, it's hard not to be sucked in too. If you're struggling against the pressure, it is useful to understand how the pressure works on teens.

Social pressure If someone you like, admire or know has done the challenge and tells you to do it as well, it's hard to say no. In the ice bucket challenge, for example, having done the challenge, the wet and cold victim then challenged, by name, other people to do it too. This is a difficult one. It seems like turning down a dare. But remember that these crazes are forgotten in days. If you don't want to do it, simply delay for a while until everyone moves on to the next big thing.

Attention seeking There is a temptation to up the ante with a challenge, to do something bigger or riskier than previous people to get more attention. Try to remember that all these things are quickly forgotten: a sensation one moment is yesterday's news the next.

Curiosity Teens like to push their limits – and this is a natural part of growing up. But remember that what you see on social media are the successful attempts; people don't post their failures.

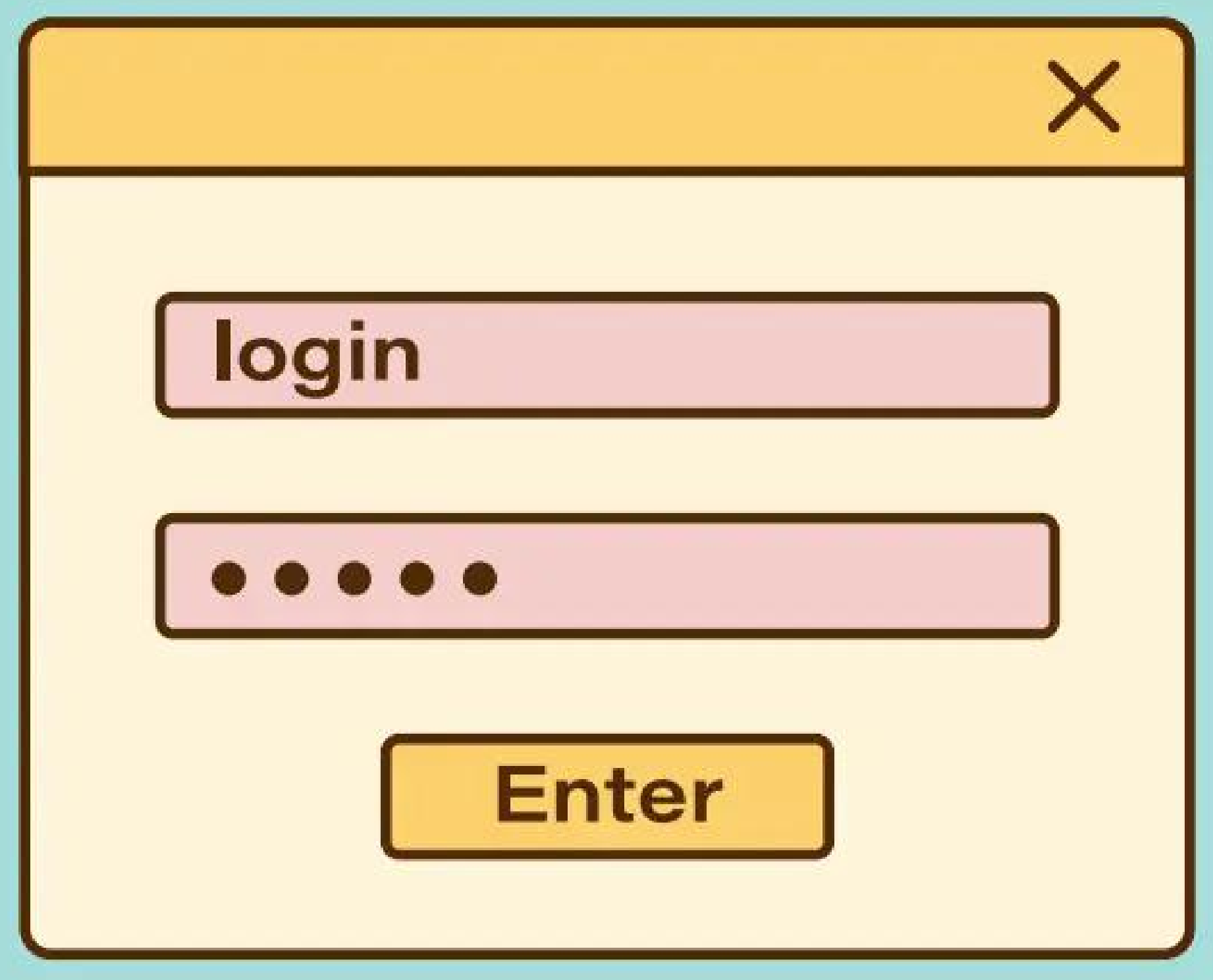
Social contagion Internet challenges are like behaviour viruses that suddenly spring up and infect lots of people before they disappear just as quickly. No one would bother doing the ice bucket challenge now. This is called social contagion and it works like a disease but without the germs. If you don't want to get infected, don't follow the people who might pass the disease on to you.

10 Rules FOR SOCIAL MEDIA Life

How to make sure it's you who is in charge, not the app

Content

Remember, the internet is forever and for everyone. Don't put anything online that you wouldn't want some people, such as your family and teachers, to see now, or other people, such as potential employers, to see in the future.

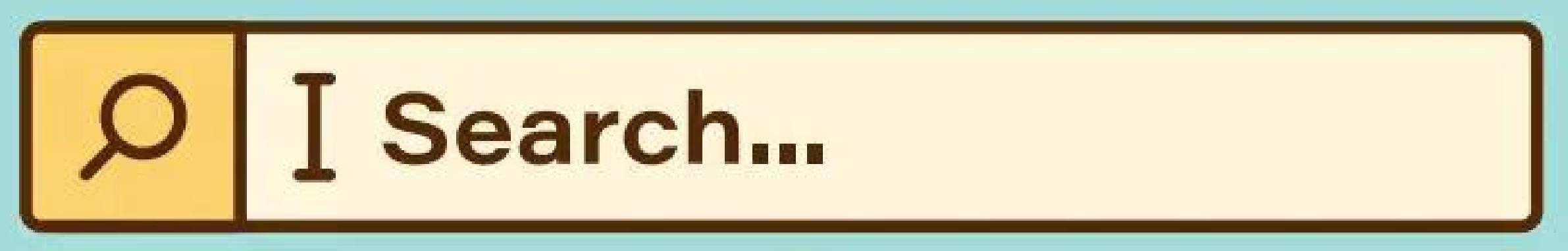


Track time

Have an aim. Try not to mindlessly scroll down the page. TikTok and Instagram are set up to keep you scrolling. Their algorithms are purposely set up to try and make you always think, just one more.

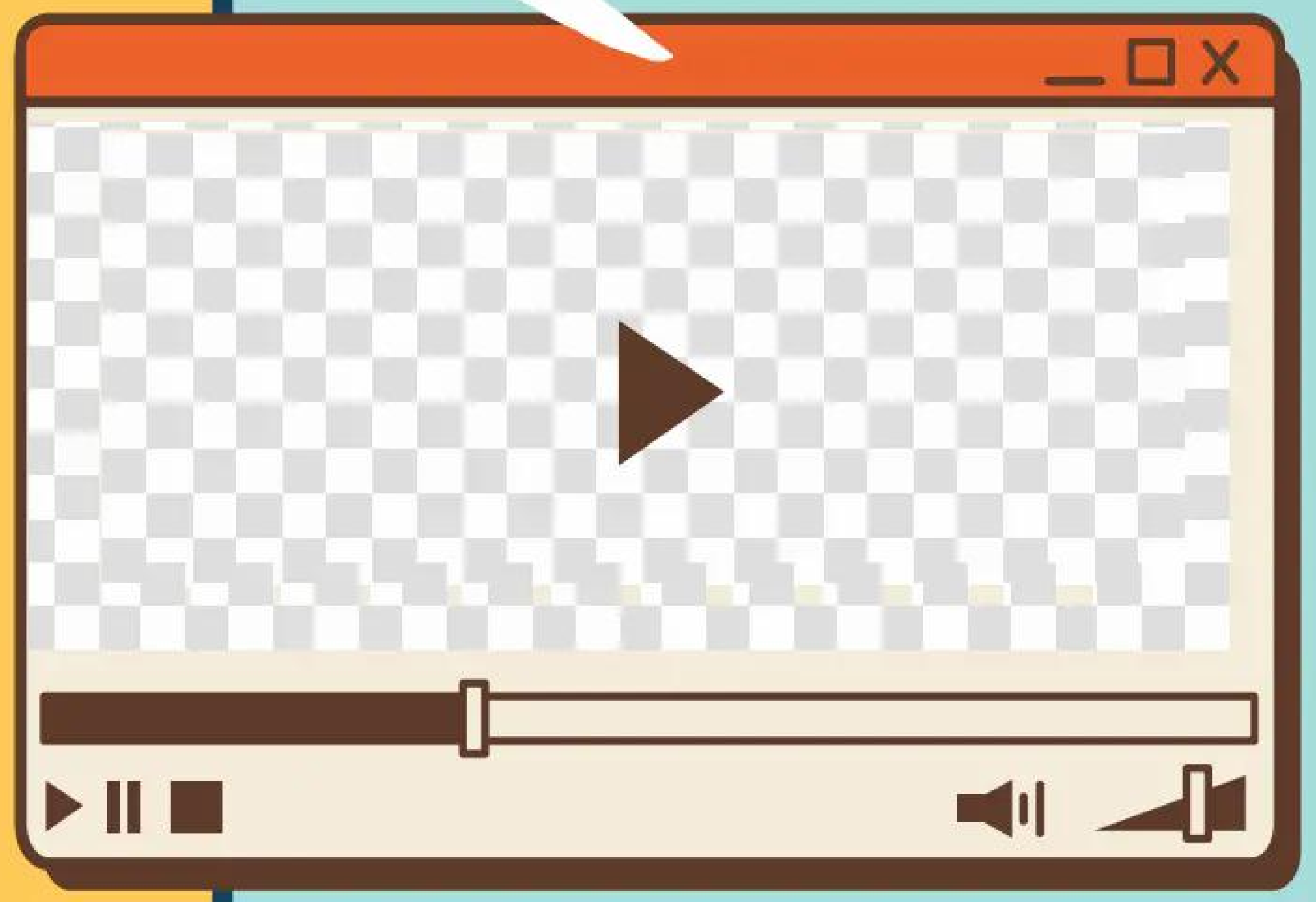
Restraint

Don't overshare. Posting every last detail of your life online will only get people bored.



Stay real

Remember, it's not real life. What people share on social media, and particularly on TikTok and Instagram, is carefully selected to show them in the best light. Don't compare yourself to what you see online.

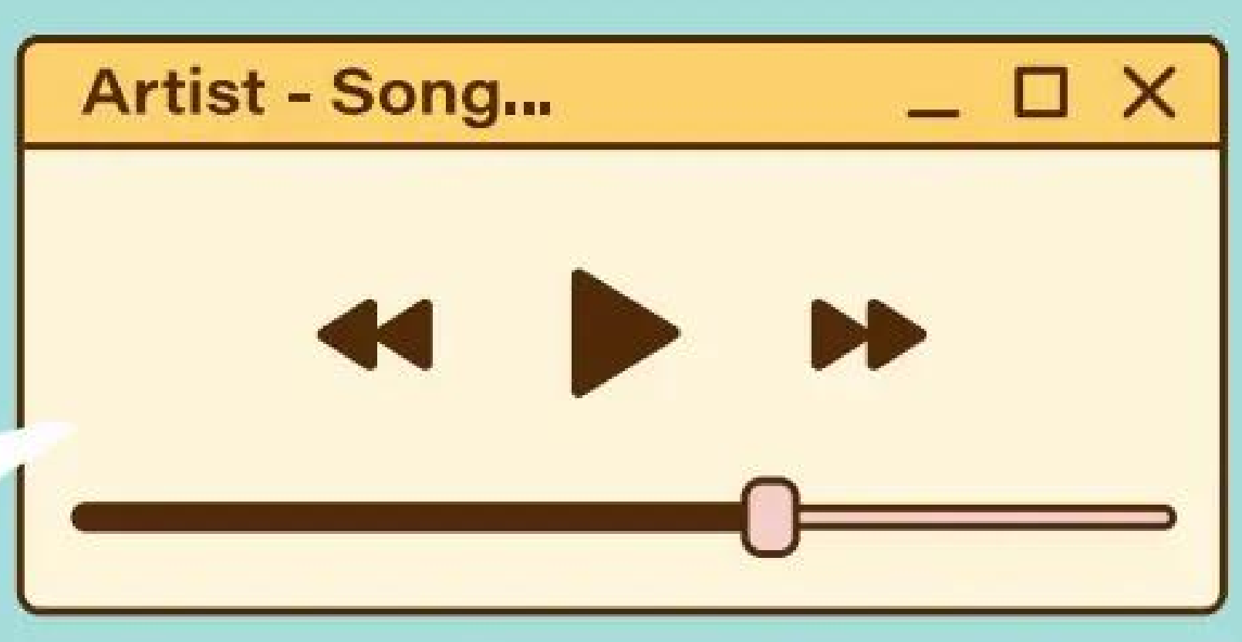


Best content

Find good stuff to follow. You are in charge of your homepage, so curate content that makes you smile! Look for accounts that lift your mood and follow them, from cat videos to funny memes.

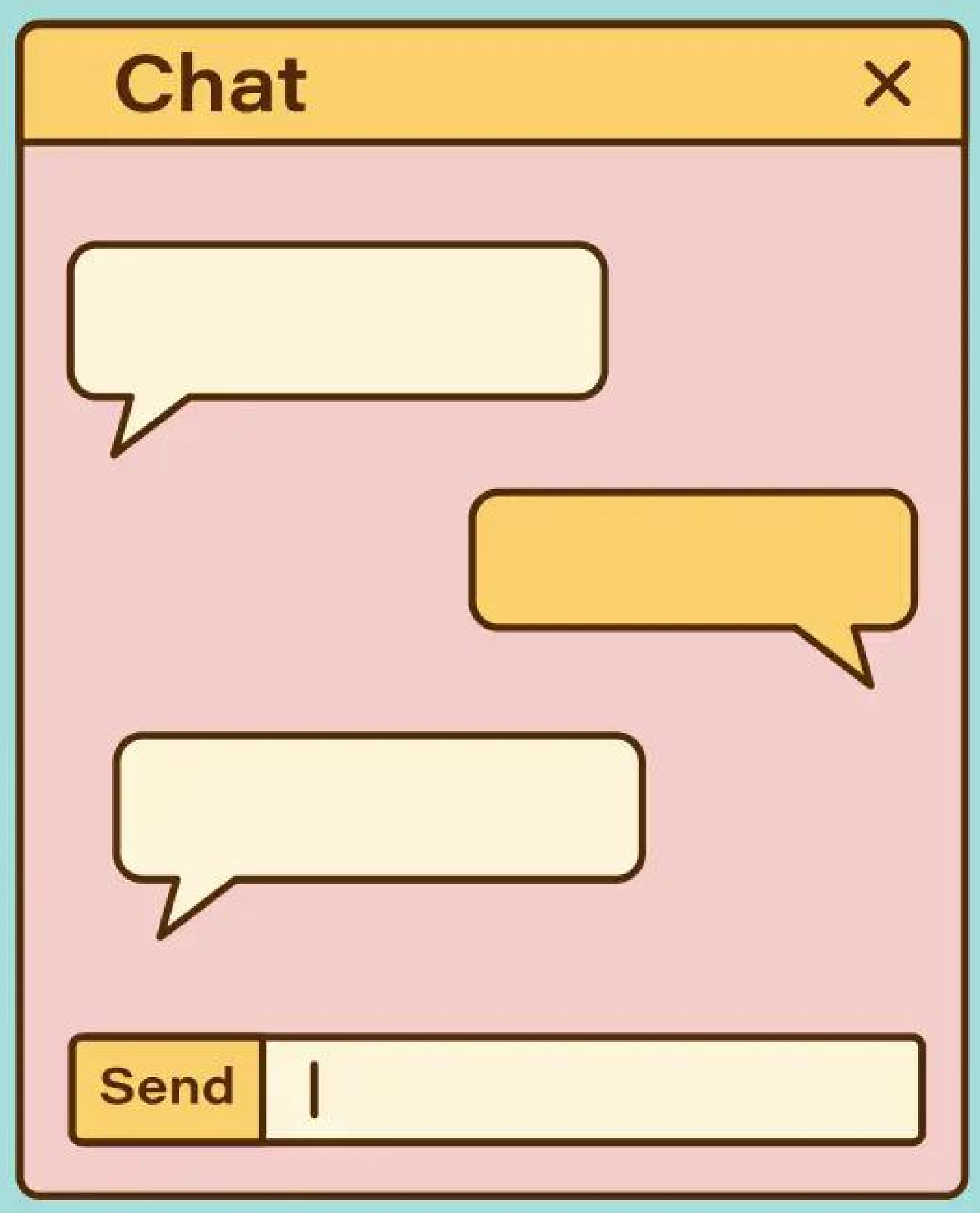
Be aware

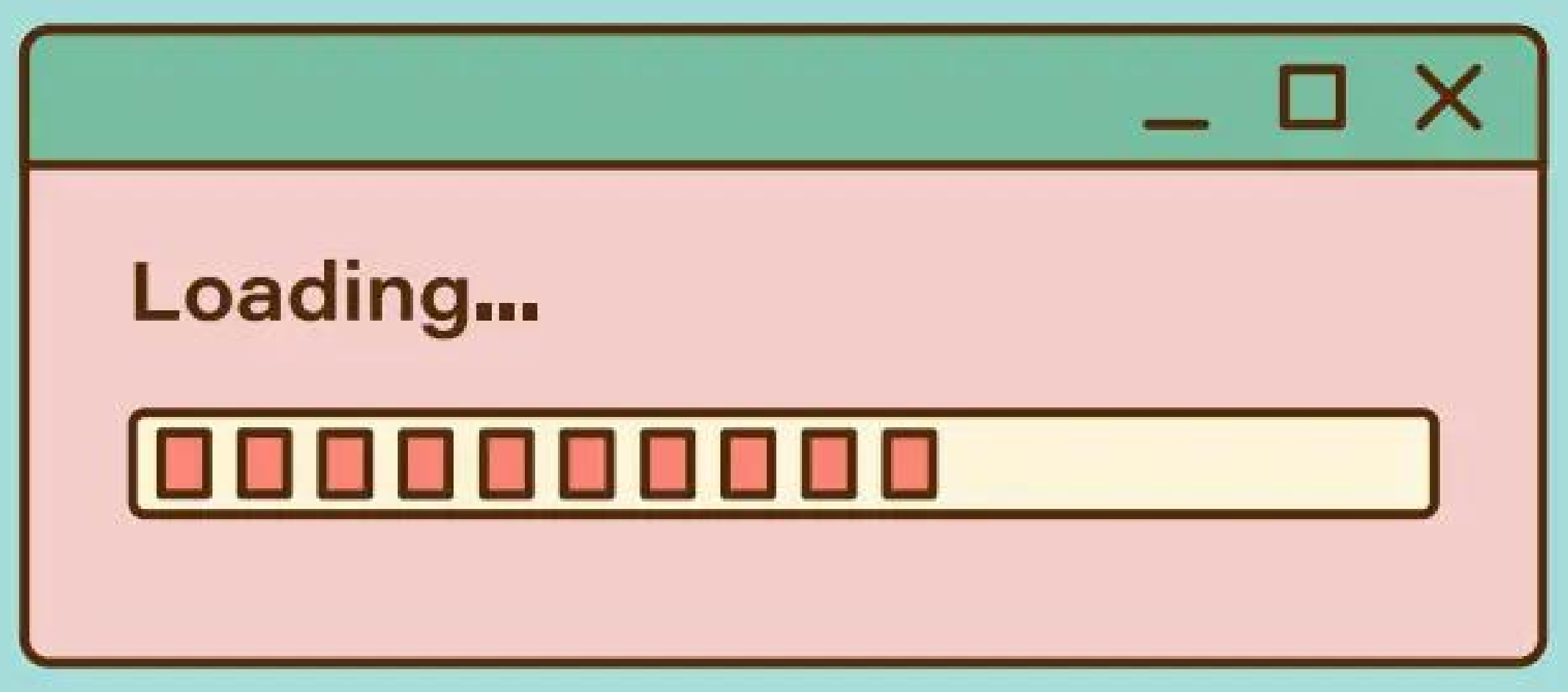
Don't post live information about your whereabouts. You wouldn't let the world know when your house is empty, similarly don't tell everyone where you are.


Artist - Song...

Mute

Mute downer friends. If the people who leave you feeling down are real-life friends, you can mute them so they don't appear in your feed without the tell-tale of unfollowing them.





Don't overshare

Keep your personal information personal. Never post your date of birth, phone number, address or any contact information on social media. Identity thieves trawl the internet looking for precisely this sort of information to set up false accounts using stolen identity.

Unfollow

If some people leave you feeling bad, stop following them. You are in control.

Messages

Don't respond to requests to message just because someone asks you. Some might be legit but in most cases these are scammers or sellers or pervs. Delete and block.

When SOCIALISING is scary

How social anxiety can stop you living your life and what to do about it

CHALLENGE THE VOICE

YOU KNOW, THAT VOICE, THE ONE IN YOUR HEAD THAT TELLS YOU THAT YOU'RE USELESS. THAT'S THE RAT VOICE, GNAWING AT YOUR CONFIDENCE. IT WON'T SHUT UP BUT ASK IT TO SAY WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN. IN MOST CASES, WHEN FACED WITH MAKING FEARS CONCRETE, THE RAT VOICE CAN'T COME UP WITH ANYTHING MUCH.

You know what? Social anxiety is normal. Think of the most popular person in school – even they get nervous before speaking in public or going to a party where they don't know many people. This is completely natural and nothing to worry about. Social anxiety only becomes a problem when it grows so pervasive and overpowering that it stops you living your life.

Unfortunately, social anxiety disorder is among the most common of anxiety disorders. Researchers estimate that about 12 percent of the US population will suffer from social anxiety at some point during their lives. What's more, social anxiety disorder usually first manifests in the teenage years. Because let's face it – there's no other time in life when we are more painfully aware of ourselves in relation to other people.

WHAT'S GOING IN YOUR BRAIN

Stress is completely natural. It's what the body does to prepare us for new situations. The amygdala, a deep and ancient part of the brain, releases hormones to get our bodies ready for action. But if there's nothing to fear, the amygdala winds down; we relax. But for people with social anxiety disorder, conscious fears of the social situation reinforce the anxiety, stoking the amygdala so that it produces more and more stress hormones.

NEW PEOPLE, PLACES AND EXPERIENCES

The teenage years are when we go through the highest density of new experiences and new emotions. There's the violent eruption of sexual feelings, an intense desire to understand how

TRIGGERS

Anticipate what can make you anxious

There are numerous situations that can cause you to feel social anxiety as a teenager, most of which force you to meet and socialise with new people or stand up in front of others. You're not alone – this can be a challenge to everyone, including those who don't develop a full social anxiety disorder.

EXTRACURRICULARS

As a teen you are encouraged to join more social clubs, teams and other extracurriculars that will force you outside of your comfort zone.

PARTIES AND CONCERTS

Teenage parties are often a great opportunity to make new friends, but it can be very daunting too! You might also attend gigs or go to teen club nights where there will be a large number of people you don't know.

NEW CLASSES

Every year you will have a new set of peers in your classes who you might not already know.

NEW-FOUND FREEDOM

You will have the freedom to go places alone without your parents for support, meaning you will have to fend for yourself in different surroundings and with different people.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

It's likely that you will have to give a presentation or speech to your class or a group of people at some point during your teens, such as a debate, reading out loud in front of your class or as part of a group project.

GOING OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Use this quick breathing method when things are getting tough

Anxiety is normal in new social situations. But it's important to try and go through with them, because facing your fears can ultimately disarm them when you realise it wasn't as bad as you thought it would be. When presenting to others or meeting new people, one popular tip is to visualise everyone naked! This is supposed to take the pressure off and make everyone seem less threatening – they are only human after all! While this isn't always the best advice, visualisation and breathing can be very helpful when you are anxious about a social situation. Try the 5-5-5 rule, a quick breathing technique:

Inhale deeply as you count to five slowly

Hold your breath for a further five counts

Exhale for five seconds

Repeat this until you feel calmer and your thoughts slow down.

You might want to close your eyes and visualise your worries as a dark shadow leaving your body as you breathe out.

we fit into the world and among our peers, and all the pressures of exams and new beginnings. So it's really not surprising that the great majority of people who suffer from social anxiety disorder first experience it during their teenage years.

HOW TO OVERCOME SOCIAL ANXIETY

The good news is that there are effective treatments to help you cope with the condition. The most common is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This normally takes the form of a short course of sessions (usually between five and ten) with a trained therapist. The CBD therapist will explore the problem with you and then give you exercises to work on between each session.

> "Although common, it responds to treatment"

These exercises aim to change the fixed thinking patterns that produce the anxiety loop. So the therapist might ask you to write down the fears you have about attending a party and then consider both how bad these fears really are and the likelihood of them being realised. Other exercises will help you to reduce the physical and emotional effects of anxiety, such as consciously reducing the speed of your breathing or using grounding techniques where you change your focus from your fear to your immediate surroundings, taking yourself out of your self-loathing headspace and into the world outside.

Many of these techniques can be done without a therapist. If you are suffering from social anxiety disorder, then it's worth looking up ways to help yourself and trying them out, as it can take a long time to see a CBD therapist through the NHS. The further good news is that, although social anxiety is common, it responds well to treatment. Even without any treatment, most sufferers find that their symptoms reduce as they get older and more comfortable inside their skin.

SIGNS OF SOCIAL ANXIETY

Here are some of the symptoms of social anxiety disorder:

- An inner voice constantly telling you that you're rubbish and can't do what other people can.
- Excessive self-criticism.
- Excruciating self-consciousness.
- Worrying for weeks or months before a party or other social situation takes place.
- High levels of anxiety and fear.
- Obsessively worrying that you will do something bad to draw attention to yourself.
- Alternatively, obsessively worrying that no one will notice you.
- Sweating, stomach pain or nausea, fast or shallow breathing, blushes, sweating or tenseness before a social situation.
- Avoiding parties, functions or presentations that will put you into stressful social situations.
- Refusing to participate in class, particularly avoiding asking or answering any questions or doing presentations.

AUTISM AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

When other people are enigmas, social interaction becomes even more difficult

"That's another theory wrong"

That's what a teenage autistic boy said coming home after school. Unlike neurotypical teens, he could not just intuit what his peers meant in social situations; he had to work it out – every time. Imagine the strain of every social interaction when you are trying to decode what someone actually means all the time. This is what autistic teens face. So it should not be surprising that social situations provoke greater degrees of anxiety among them than neurotypical teens. In fact, anxiety is the constant backdrop to life as an autistic person: the prevalent fear that they are misunderstanding everything.

A great part of autistic social anxiety is due to the unpredictability of social situations, particularly among large groups of people or new acquaintances. What can make the situation worse is that many autistic people can find social situations, particularly parties and gatherings, a complete sensory overload. To help an autistic teen deal with the stress of social contact, make sure not to force them into a neurotypical box. For instance, being told to maintain eye contact can be incredibly stressful – but there is a dodge. You can appear to keep eye contact by looking at someone's forehead rather than their eyes. They will think you are looking into their eyes but you are not. It's also important that autistic teenagers are given plenty of time after the social situation to regather themselves.

Autistic teens usually find the concise and clear measures taken with cognitive behavioural therapy helpful, so if social anxiety is proving crippling this is another option.

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES. WORDS: EDOARDO ALBERT

HOW TO SAY DIFFICULT *things*

There's something you want to tell your parents. But, it's difficult, they won't understand.

This is how to do it...

You've got something to tell your parents. It's been building up for months, years even. Trouble is, you're pretty sure they're not going to like it. After all, they keep reminiscing about all those anti-war marches they went on in the distant past and how they support the struggle against imperialism today. So telling them that you want to join the army is going to be an awkward topic to bring up. Or perhaps you've been putting off a conversation with your atheist parents, where you want to tell them that you've decided you believe in God and want to be baptised. Or maybe it's just that you want to ask your parents to cut back on their alcohol intake or take better care of themselves.

These are all difficult conversations and there are many other challenging talks that might confront you in the short few years between becoming independent and actually achieving independence. While it's your parents that will most likely be the ones you need to tell something to, there could be other conversations where you want to tell your friends about something you've done without coming across as big headed – such as if you have been signed up with a major sports team, or that you've got an offer for your first-choice university.

In all such cases, the key to telling people what you want to tell them, and ensuring they hear you, is not actually down to the talking – it's the listening. The great secret at the heart of getting a message across is hearing what the other person is trying to tell you. So here is some handy advice for what to do when you know you can no longer delay having that big, important, scary conversation.

SWITCH OFF YOUR PHONE

It might seem obvious, but turn your phone off before starting. Yes, it might be helpful: maybe you need to show them something on it, maybe you think it calms you down, but the notifications on phones have been designed – by skilled psychologists – to grab attention. No mindful conversation is possible if you are continually allowing yourself to be distracted by the phone alerts.

HOW YOU SAY THINGS MATTERS JUST AS MUCH AS WHAT IT IS YOU SAY

Many studies have shown that, when speaking with other people, how you speak matters far more than the words that actually come out of your mouth. In fact, in some circumstances, up to 90 percent of what you mean will be conveyed by body language and tone of voice. So if you have something big to say, always remember that how you say it will determine the way it is received just as much as what you are actually saying.

It is therefore important to be mindful of what your body is saying when you are speaking and, just as importantly, when you are listening. Are you closing yourself off by crossing your arms and turning away? Open yourself up and turn towards the person you are speaking to. Has the pitch of your voice risen, indicating anger and frustration?

> "How you speak matters more than the words that come out"

IMAGES: GETTY

Big BEGINNINGS

5 ways to start a difficult conversation

One
I need your help with something.

Two
Would it be alright if I got your opinion on a situation I am currently facing?

Three
I would appreciate your input on a problem I have.

Four
If you've got time, I would like to go through something with you.

Five
I know you want the best for me. I have something that has been on my mind that I want to tell you about.

CHOOSE A SAFE SPACE

HAVE THE CONVERSATION IN A PLACE WHICH IS COMFORTABLE FOR BOTH OF YOU, IN A PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SENSE, TO KEEP THINGS CALM.

Lower it. This will help to ensure that the people you are speaking to will listen to what you are saying.

UNDERSTAND WHAT THE OTHER PERSON IS SAYING

You may have rehearsed what you want to say many times in your head, but for the person you are speaking to, it's all a surprise – possibly an unpleasant surprise. So if they respond by saying something hurtful or challenging, make sure that you understand correctly what they have said. One way to do that is to put their response into your own words and ask them if that is what they meant. Even if it truly is hurtful, don't become angry in return but try to understand where that anger is coming from. Remember, this is all old news for you, but it isn't for them.

THINK BEFORE SPEAKING

Don't just let the words tumble from your mouth. Once you've made your initial speech – maybe you planned that out – it's too easy to then get caught up in the thrust and counterthrust of argument and disagreement. Remember, you can't slow down the other person, but taking time to speak accurately and mindfully yourself will have the effect of slowing down the overall conversation. This is important, as it means all parties will be able to reflect and think before saying something they will later regret.

DON'T REACT, RESPOND

In these sorts of big, life-changing conversations, if the other parties don't react in the way that you would hope, it's natural to leap to conclusions about what they are saying and react to that, rather than to what they are actually saying. Don't do this.

If someone says something that hurts, stop. Take a deep breath. Look at them, to understand if it was really meant to hurt you or something just said in the heat of the moment. Breathe again. Then respond, from your depths, and not from the surface parts of your ego that would just lash back in self-defence.

CONCENTRATE ON LISTENING, NOT PLANNING WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO SAY NEXT

You have a point to make. So while the other person is speaking, what you are really doing is rehearsing in your mind your next, completely crushing, reply. But this is not a conversation. This is a series of monologues, marked by incomprehension and the failure to listen. A mindful conversation is one where you try to truly listen to and understand what the other person is saying. And by listening, mindfully, the chances are that you will find the person you are speaking to wants what is good for you as well. Then that big conversation really will be the start of something big.

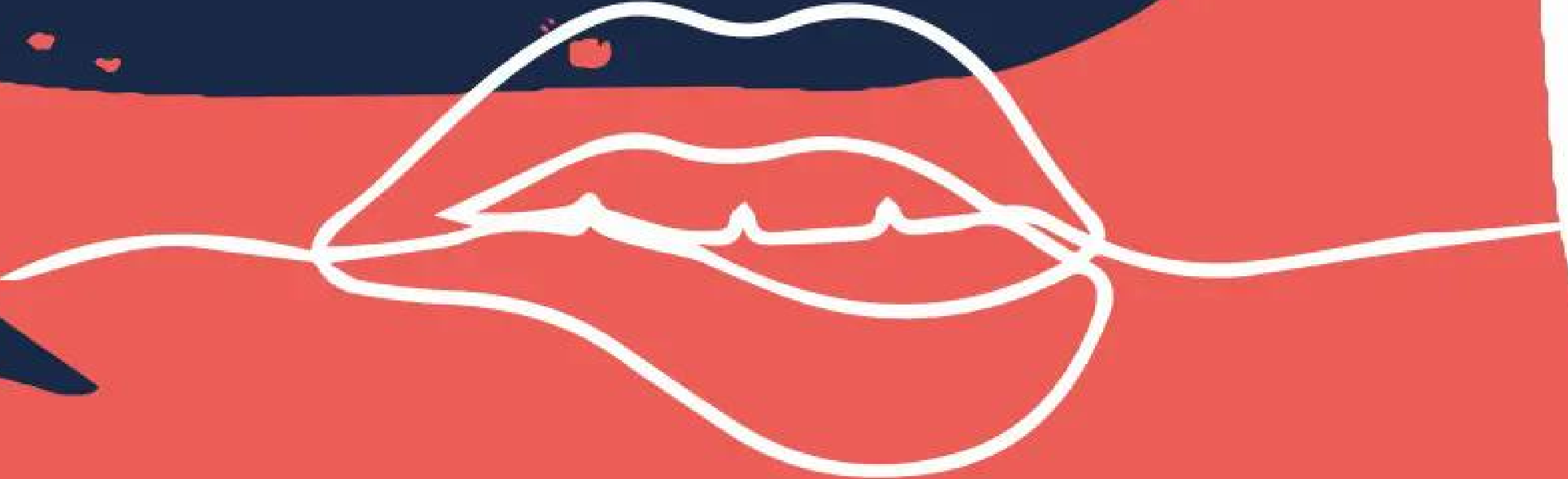
> **"Make sure that you understand what they have said"**

USING YOUR EARS

A successful conversation is about listening. Here are some tips to help you listen better

Take a breath

Breathe. When things become stressful, our breathing becomes quick and shallow: it's an instinctive fight-or-flight reaction from when our ancestors had to face predators. While useful when facing a hungry lion, it's counterproductive during an intense conversation. To stop the adrenalin kicking in, consciously slow down your breathing, breathe more deeply, hold the in-breath for a moment, and then exhale slowly. And repeat. Pause, breathe, listen. Pause, breathe, listen.



Show you understand

We often assume we know what someone is saying, so while they are still speaking, we plan an answer in our head. But that means that we have stopped listening. A key part of mindful listening is to hear what the other person is actually saying. So wait, listen to what they are saying, and then answer. It could be that you both have very different ideas, but by listening and understanding their position – and telling them that you are trying to understand what they are saying and why they are saying it – will avoid tension and also encourage the other person to understand what you are trying to say.

Temper your reaction

In a difficult conversation, it's likely the other person will say something that will upset you, triggering various feelings. But remember, these are responses within you: they are not the result of what the other person has actually said. It is easy to misunderstand what the other person is saying and you may be getting upset for no reason. To ensure you have understood, repeat what they have said in your own words and ask them if that is a fair summary of what they meant. This keeps the conversation grounded in what both people actually mean.

LET GO OF THE CONTROL

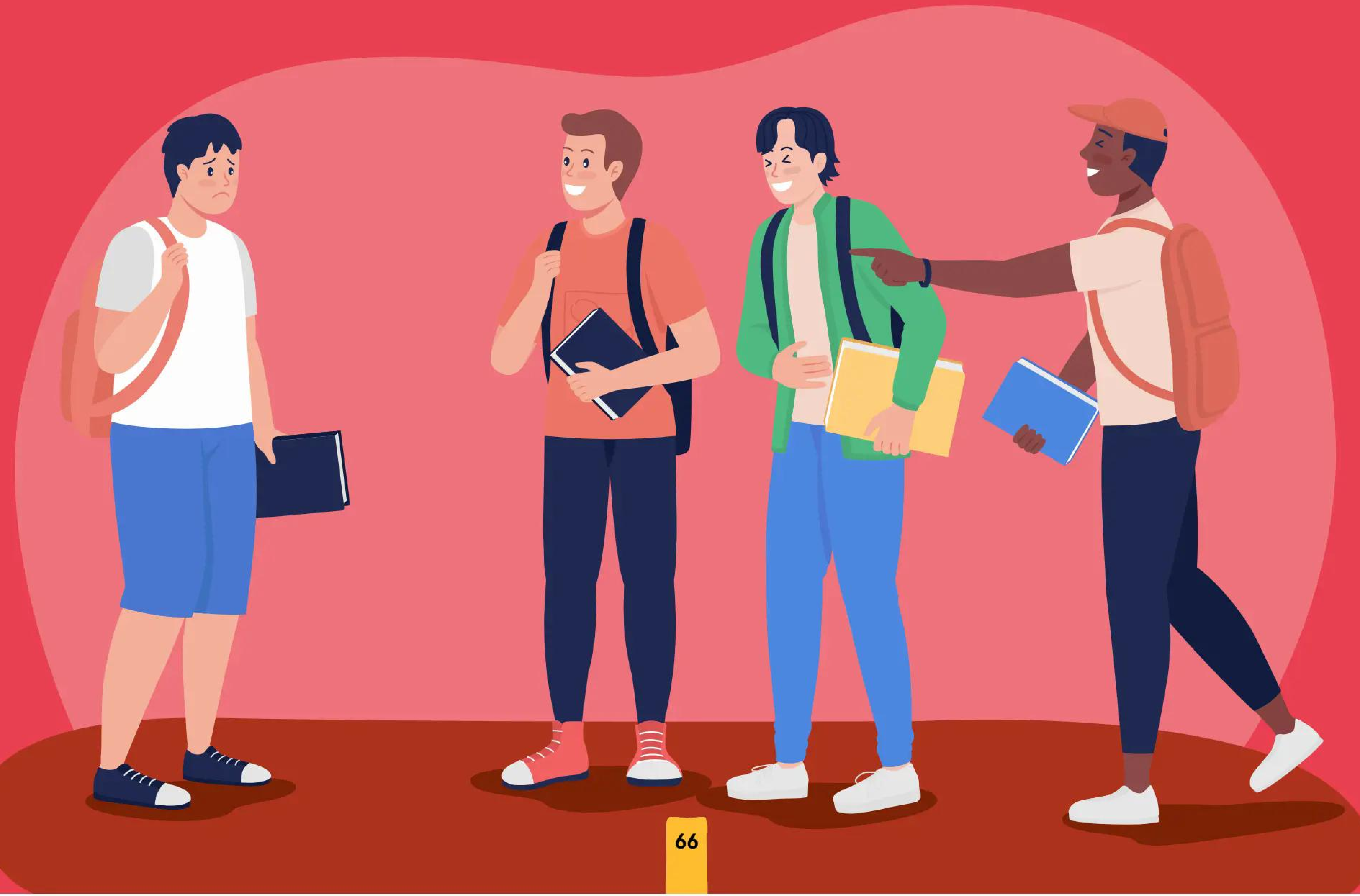
YOU CAN'T CONTROL WHAT THE OTHER PERSON SAYS, THINKS OR FEELS – YOU CAN ONLY CONTROL YOUR RESPONSE AND ACTIONS.

IMAGES: GETTY

Standing Up TO PEER PRESSURE

It can come in many forms and be **difficult** to handle, but with **this guide** you can learn to **overcome peer pressure** and avoid doing something you'll **regret**

Staying true to yourself can be one of the toughest challenges as you navigate through your school years and into adulthood, especially in the face of peer pressure. It's perfectly natural to want to 'fit in', even more so when facing the confusing and sometimes overwhelming challenges of being a teenager. Here we take a look at the causes and effects of peer pressure and explore how best to equip yourself in order to deal with it in the right way.



WRITTEN BY: BEE GINGER. IMAGES: GETTY

WHAT IS PEER PRESSURE?

The definition of a peer is someone who is of equal standing or status as you. This means that as a teenager, your peers will be classmates, teammates and friends in your age group. Often these peers will influence you, even though you might not realise it at the time. This can be a positive thing; a peer might recommend a good film or book or suggest taking up a new hobby. However, outside influences can also be negative, and sometimes you might find that your peers encourage you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, such as skipping school, being unkind to someone or experimenting with alcohol. This can make you feel lonely, inadequate and betrayed, which can in turn massively affect your self-esteem and self-worth.

This is what we call peer pressure, and it can make you feel like you have to do something you don't want to do just to feel accepted, included or to make someone like you. If you feel uncomfortable, though, or that what you are being asked to do is wrong, you can say no. You decide what is best for you, nobody else. The people that you need to surround yourself with or who are your true friends will always listen to you and accept your decision. It is not okay for friends to put pressure on you. You can say no and still have friends and feel accepted, plus there are ways to help you feel more confident when it comes to saying how you feel.

But there is no sugar-coating it; saying 'no' can be hard, especially if you're the only one saying it. But that doesn't mean that you're wrong, especially in a situation where you feel unsure or unsafe. It may make you feel alone and like you have to do things other people tell you to in order to feel accepted but that really isn't the case.>

Friend or foe?

How to spot a toxic friend and what to do next

They say good friends are hard to find, and it's true. Once you have formed a solid friendship it can last a lifetime, but when it comes to toxic friends it's a different story entirely. These relationships can do a lot more harm than good. But how do you spot a toxic friend?

A toxic friend is someone who exhibits behaviours and actions that hurt other people, or impact the lives of people in a negative way. For example, someone who claims to be your friend but does things that harm you or puts you in an uncomfortable situation; someone who doesn't have your best interests at heart. Ask yourself the following:

- *Does the friendship feel one-sided? Do you put in the majority or all of the effort?*
- *Do you feel like your friend respects your boundaries and accepts your opinions?*
- *Does your friend make you feel like everything is always your fault even when it's not the case?*
- *Does your friend guilt trip you? Do they make you feel bad about your choices or decisions, or encourage you to change your mind?*
- *Do you feel emotionally drained by them? For example, do you listen to all their problems and support them, but they don't do the same for you?*
- *Are they trustworthy? Can you trust them with your secrets? Or do you think they might tell other people? Do they have your back in a bad situation? Do other people trust them?*
- *Are they manipulative? Do they try to persuade you to do things you are not comfortable with and put pressure on you when you refuse? Do they celebrate your achievements? Are they happy for you when something positive happens?*
- *Do they have empathy for you? If you are sad or unwell do they feel sorry for you or go out of their way to help and comfort you?*
- *Do they bully you?*

If the answer is yes to one or more of these it might be time to rethink your friendship choices. Talking to an adult about it might also help.

CAUTION
CAUTION

How to be assertive

Standing your ground and doing what is right for you is never the wrong choice

It can sometimes be very difficult to say how you really feel. Often that's because you don't want to upset someone by disagreeing with them. But you have the right to say how you're feeling and explain what you want and need. This is where being assertive comes in, whether you are standing up to someone who is being rude or disrespectful, ending a relationship or friendship, or saying no if someone is coaxing you into doing something sexual or sending pictures that you don't feel comfortable with. Here are some tips to help you assert yourself:

- *Begin by practising what you want to say. You could write it down so that you can reread it.*
- *Stand up straight with your head up high and your shoulders back. This will help you to breathe easier and speak clearer.*
- *Look at the person and make eye contact, don't look down or away.*
- *Politely and clearly say what you want to say to them.*
- *Don't apologise if you are asking for something you need.*

Being assertive is something that can help you in lots of different situations, here are a few examples where you might need to be assertive:

- *Standing up to someone who is calling you names or talking about you.*
- *Ending a relationship or friendship.*
- *Feeling confident when saying 'no' if someone is pressuring you to do something sexual, have sex or even send pictures that you don't feel comfortable with.*

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR FOLDING TO PEER PRESSURE

- To gain social acceptance; a desire to 'fit in'.
- To avoid rejection.
- A lack of structure at home or complicated homelife.
- Personal or social anxiety.
- The dreaded hormones.
- Exposure to drug use and alcohol.

SOME COMMON EXAMPLES OF PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure can be spoken (a nasty comment) or unspoken (in the form of a look or a gesture aimed to cause upset). Either way, it is always designed to encourage you towards negative behaviour, which can include:

- Cheating or copying someone else's work, or letting them copy yours.
- Leaving certain people out of activities.
- Reckless or dangerous driving.
- Stealing or shoplifting.
- Engaging in sexual activity.
- Taking drugs or drinking alcohol.
- Bullying (this also includes cyberbullying).
- Pretending to be someone else on social media.

CONFIDENCE IS KEY

It's easier said than done, but practise being assertive. Start at home by practising saying 'no' (that doesn't include not tidying your room or avoiding the washing up) just to yourself so that if a situation arises, you will be able to fire back if someone asks you to do something that you're not happy about. Be firm – it will get better the more you practise it. And don't take no for an answer. You have made your decision and you are going to stick to it.

Being assertive or saying 'no' to friends can be a really difficult thing to do, but you have to remember how important it is that you say how you feel and not get swept along with plans you really don't want to be a part of. Even if you disagree with them, a real friend will respect you and your opinions. They might have gotten used to you always agreeing with them, so the assertiveness might come as a surprise, but a good friend won't try to change you back to how you were before.

That being said, you must always think about your own safety in any situation. If you feel that being assertive with someone might not work and instead make them angry, then consider a different way to put your point across. If you feel intimidated or someone has threatened you, then talking to an adult and asking for help rather than approaching the person yourself is the best course of action to take. This also applies when it comes to standing up for others who are being pressured into doing something they don't want to do. While doing so can really help someone who is in a tricky situation, never do anything that you believe could endanger you or someone else.

Surrounding yourself with friends and peers who share your values can both reduce the possibility of peer pressure and also make it easier to say 'no' in the event that you do feel pressured or uncomfortable. Trying to avoid situations that are likely to make you feel unsafe is another way to combat peer pressure.

You can always leave a situation if you're feeling uncertain or unhappy with what's going on. Alternatively, you could try suggesting something else to do. But whatever you do, don't remain in a situation if you're not enjoying yourself or are worried in any way. You can always make an excuse that you have plans with family or you need to get home soon.

ASK FOR HELP

Peer pressure can affect each person differently. It can play on certain challenges the person already faces, like anxiety, and make it feel worse. It can have a very negative effect on mental health, especially if someone's confidence is damaged. It can also lead to problems at school, impacting academic performance, for example, and it could cause a person to distance themselves from friends and family, thereby increasing feelings of anxiety and depression. If left untreated it can even trigger suicidal thoughts or self-harm, which is why communication with friends and talking to an adult is so very important. If you don't feel comfortable speaking with a parent then ask a teacher or older sibling for help and advice.

Tips for parents

Teach your child to listen to their gut and to walk away if they feel unsafe or unsure.

Reassure them that they cannot please everybody and that there is no shame in that.

Make the effort to get to know the children your child associates with by encouraging your child to invite them home.

Foster an open environment from an early age and encourage them to speak with you about their issues, both good and bad, and keep the lines of communication open.

Let them know you are available at all times to listen and help. Reassure them that you won't be disappointed in them or angry.

> "Remember how important it is that you say how you feel"

MAKING SENSE OF YOUR Sexuality

Be it handling **newfound feelings**, talking to **someone you like** or opening up to **friends** and **family**, understanding your natural urges and **emotions** around **sex and relationships** can be a **challenge**, but you are not alone

During adolescence everything can feel that bit more intense as certain things take on a new level of importance. This is because you are experiencing a flood of new emotions that you've never encountered before. One day you feel up, the next you feel down, and you can thank your hormones for this roller coaster, particularly when it comes to finding someone you like.

REFRAMING REJECTION

Perhaps above all else, the discovery that you are interested in someone romantically can magnify your emotions dramatically, as well as alter your behaviour. You may find that you become easily distracted and think about this particular person all the time, even bringing their name into conversations at every opportunity. You might spend more time on your appearance or hiding out in your room so you can text or talk to them privately. This is all perfectly normal, but you might also find you start to experience more extreme mood swings and begin to feel increasingly anxious. If so, talking to a parent or your friends about your feelings can really help. It's likely that your friends will have dealt with similar feelings, and your parents definitely will have. Whoever it is that you choose to speak to, be open and honest about your feelings.

When it comes to communicating with the person you have a crush on, try talking to them in person or, if you feel more comfortable, connect with them on social media. You might be surprised to discover that they like you too. However, if that's not the case then you could be left feeling very hurt and confused. Thankfully, there are ways to manage rejection in a healthy and positive manner.

Fear of rejection, not to mention rejection itself, can be incredibly hard to deal with, particularly if you suffer with anxiety, but there are some steps that you can take in order to work through the feelings that come with it. Begin by acknowledging your feelings and giving yourself the time to understand that there is nothing wrong with you or the way in which you are feeling. Apply a bit of self-compassion and try to see this as an opportunity to grow. Learning that someone you like doesn't feel the same way hurts, but it is in no way a reflection of you. Take the time to challenge any negative thoughts and confront your fears. This doesn't need to become something that holds you back, but if you find you are struggling, seek the help of friends or family. Everyone has faced rejection at some point, and hearing how someone you trust moved beyond it can be invaluable.

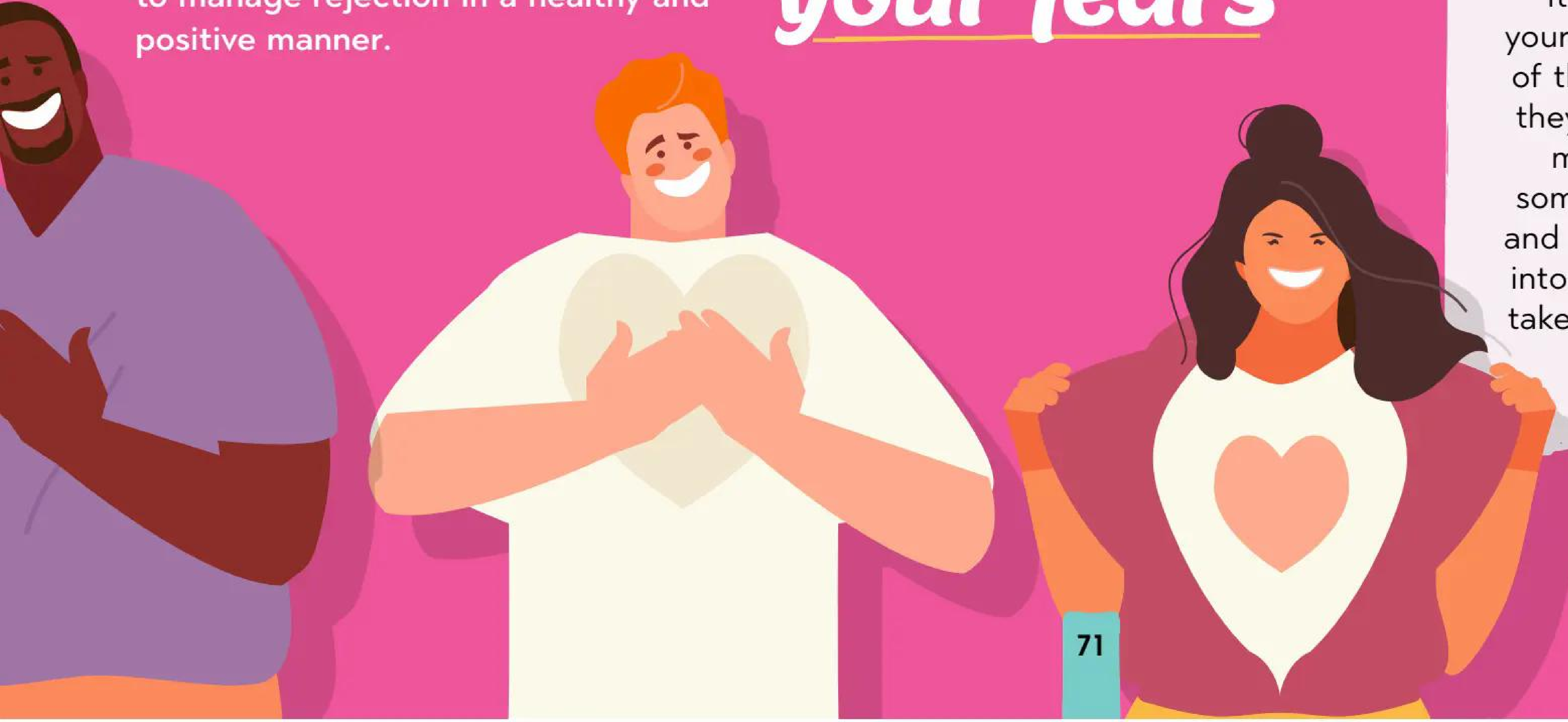
> "Take the time to confront your fears"

Giving up the ghost

There are many ways in which you might experience rejection. None of them are pleasant, but it's good to recognise the signs and pull back before you get too hurt

The phrase "It's not you, it's me" might seem cliché, but often rejection isn't a reflection of you at all – it really is them! The way in which someone rejects you, either before or after you have any form of relationship, says more about them than it does you. Being kind and compassionate when you aren't interested in someone, or your situation changes and you don't want to pursue a relationship, unfortunately doesn't come naturally to many, and there are numerous ways you can be rejected in the digital world, including ghosting (abruptly ignoring you) and breadcrumbing (mostly ignoring you but occasionally sending you something small, like a meme). It is important to not doubt yourself or your own worth if any of these things happen to you – they are a coward and wouldn't make you happy anyway. If someone is causing you anxiety and sending your nervous system into overdrive in a negative way, take it as a sign they aren't right for you and move on!

WRITTEN BY: BEE GINGER & ALICE PATILLO. IMAGES: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK



FIGURING OUT YOUR FEELINGS

For many, adolescence is often the dawn of sexual attraction, and this is due to the hormonal changes your body experiences as you reach puberty. These changes affect both your body and your mind. For example, thinking of someone you like can cause you to experience a physical sensation called arousal. These new emotions and feelings can be incredibly overwhelming, not to mention confusing. During this period of intense growth you will start to explore your sexuality, which is part of the wider process of understanding and accepting your identity.

This is a period in your life when you will begin to develop sexual feelings and possibly be engaging in sexual experiences. This is a natural part of adolescence and everybody experiences it differently. What is important is that you only do what feels right for you, and if you are ever unsure of something or don't feel safe, ask an adult for help.

Navigating your teenage years can be difficult enough without the added stress brought on by hormones and puberty. It is natural to be confused about your changing body, thoughts and feelings – particularly when it comes to the opposite sex, or the same sex, or both. You should never feel ashamed of how you feel, but it can understandably be difficult to share these feelings with others. You might feel confused about your sexuality, and that's okay. You don't need to decide where you sit on the sexuality spectrum now – or ever! Some people might be certain they are gay or straight, others might be less sure about who they are attracted to. Every experience is just as valid but navigating any romantic feelings – or having none at all – each comes with a unique set of anxieties.

Many people feel relieved once they've discussed their feelings around their sexuality with somebody that they trust, as this enables them to be their authentic self and realise that they are accepted for who they are. Others worry about how people might react or whether it is safe for them to open up to someone. Will they face discrimination, bullying or harassment if their sexual preferences don't align with what others expect?

It is crucial that you trust your gut and only discuss your feelings with someone you know you can rely on at a time when you are ready to do so. Many people who are gay or bi come out gradually, telling a few trusted friends and family members and gauging their reactions. It can be helpful to first try talking about sexual orientations and the issues surrounding the subject to get an idea if the people in your life are open-minded or less accepting and likely to disapprove of your sexuality. That is definitely not to say that you should ever feel the need to hide who you are, but it can be useful to ask yourself questions such as "how will this make my life easier?" and "could this make things more difficult?". Always put your well-being and safety first, and if you don't feel as

THE SEXUALITY SPECTRUM

Heterosexual (straight)

Attracted to people of the 'opposite' sex or gender.

Mostly straight

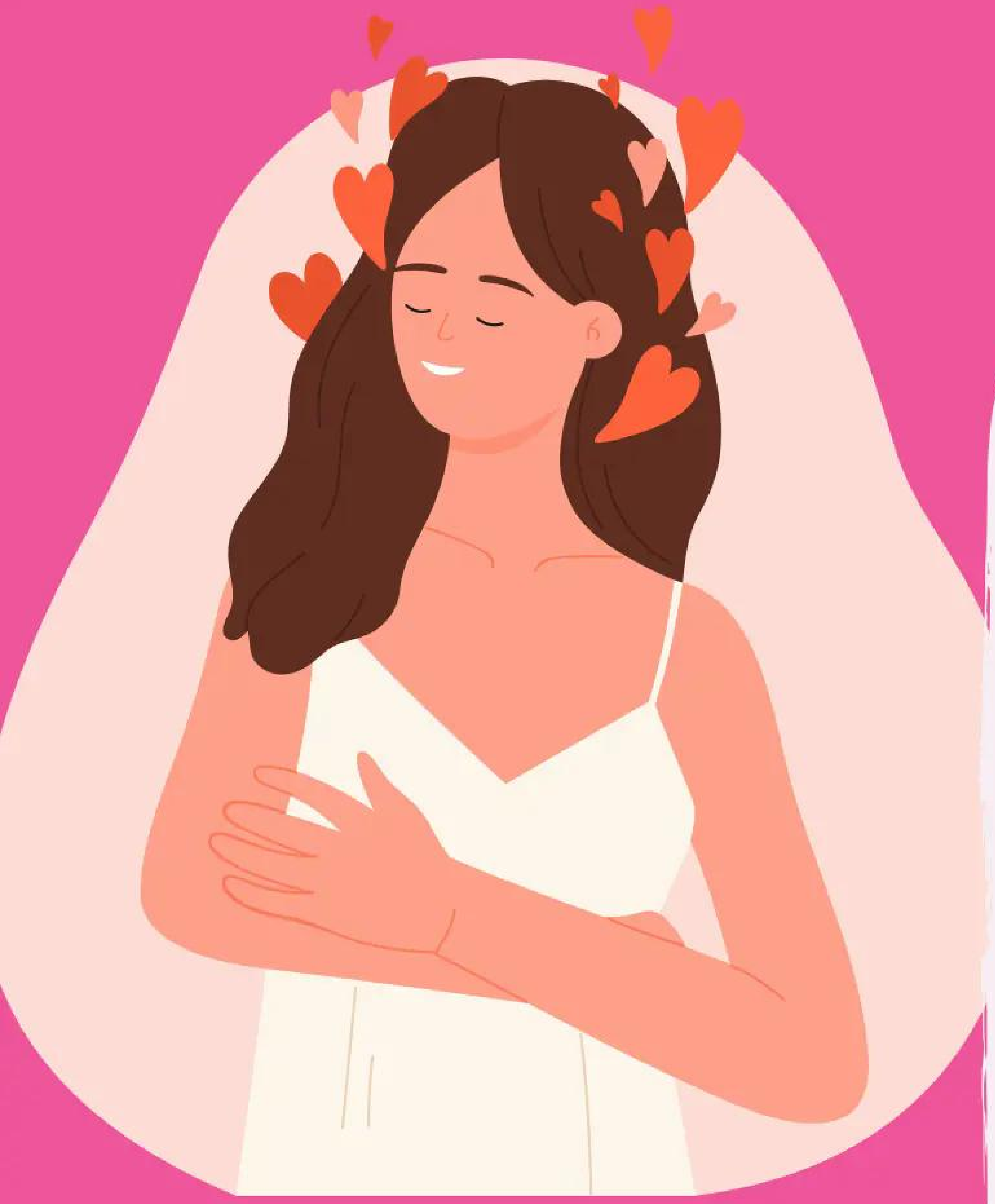
Mostly attracted to people of the opposite sex, but occasionally feel sexual attraction to, or have sexual experiences with, someone of the same sex.

Homosexual

When you are attracted to people of the same sex as yourself. Homosexual females are called lesbian or gay, and homosexual males are referred to as gay.

Mostly gay

When you are usually attracted to people of the same sex as yourself, but may occasionally feel sexual attraction to, or have sexual experiences with, people of the opposite sex.



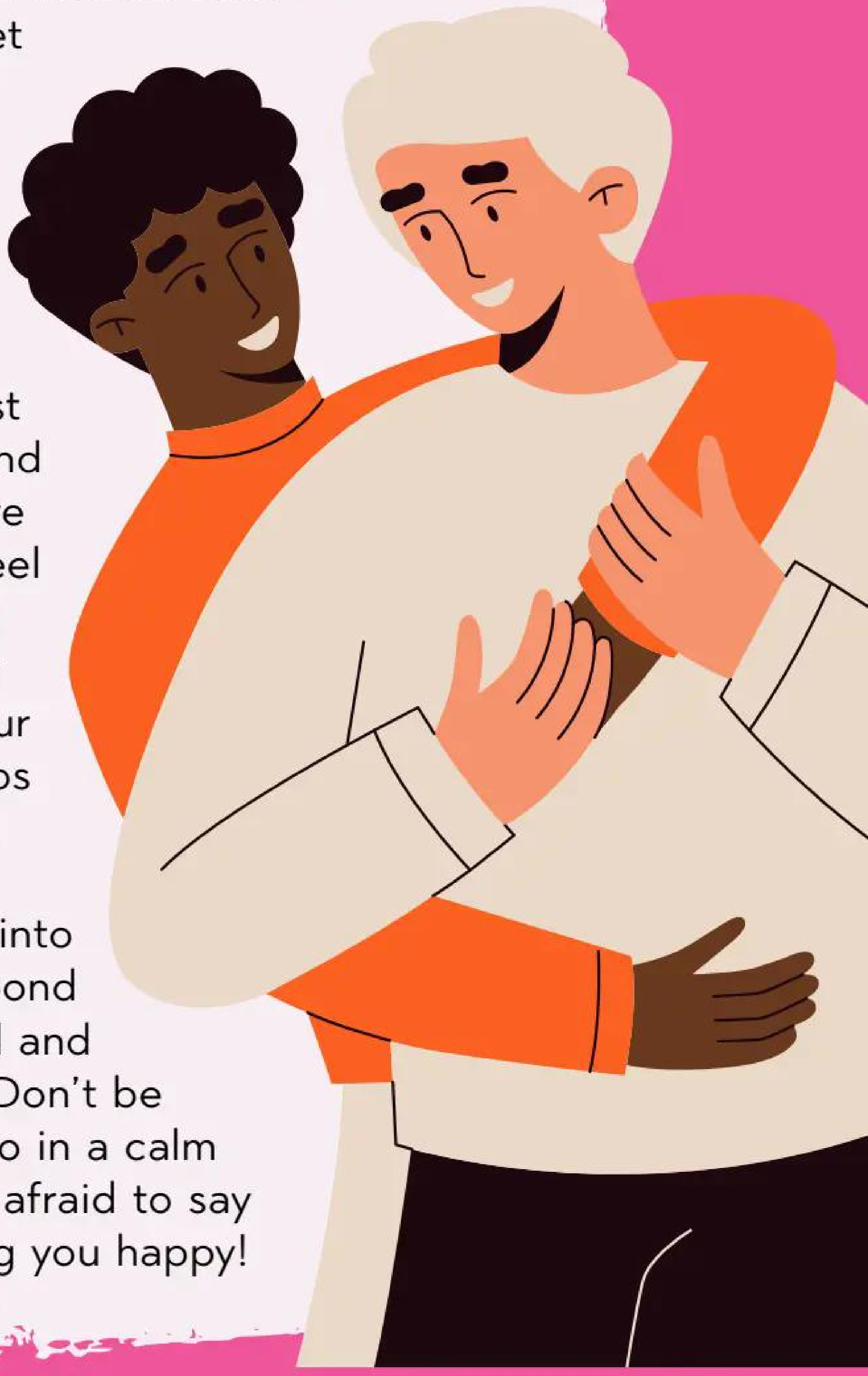
though you can confide in someone you know, please remember that there are plenty of other options available to you.

From teachers to online communities and counsellors, there is always someone you can talk to. Equally, don't forget that coming out is your personal choice, so make sure you take plenty of time to think about what is right for you. If you don't want to do it, or you don't feel there is a need to, then don't. This is your sexuality and an intrinsic part of who you are, therefore you're in control. You're also never alone, no matter how difficult things can get.

Navigating relationships

When your crush likes you back it might seem like the anxiety is over, but beginning a romance comes with its own set of worries

Once you've started going steady with someone you might still feel anxious about a whole host of things, such as sexual intimacy, whether you are ready to take the next step, if you can trust them to be faithful, fear that they might leave and worries about confronting them when something has upset you. When you struggle with anxiety, all of these feelings may cause you to push your partner away or seem clingy and obsessive. Managing your relationship by taking it slow, ensuring you spend plenty of time with friends and not focusing all of your energy on your partner, as well as being open, honest and communicating clearly, can help you to find calm. In today's fast-paced digital world there are a whole host of added pressures. Don't feel forced to make your romance seem perfect on social media, in fact, it's probably better to stay away from it completely, put away your phone and spend time in person. Relationships aren't anything like the movies – they take understanding and effort. Don't jump to conclusions when your nervous system jumps into overdrive if your partner takes a while to respond to a text or forgets to call – speak to a friend and find a distraction to calm you down instead. Don't be afraid to voice your concerns but try to do so in a calm and collected manner. And certainly don't be afraid to say no or call it quits if your partner is not making you happy!



While nobody should be pigeon-holed into a set category, this spectrum can be a useful guide for those still figuring out their sexuality

Fluid
Refers to a person who experiences changes in their sexual attraction over time and/or depending on the situation.

Queer
Refers to an identity that expands outside of heterosexuality.

Bisexual
Is when you have the capacity to form an attraction to more than one gender.

Pansexual
When you are attracted to people of any gender or to people regardless of their gender.

Asexual
Is when you are not sexually attracted to any other people.

Build your BULLY BARRIER

Bullying is something **no one should have to deal with**. In addition to asking for help to get it to stop, you can also help yourself deal with the anxiety it causes

Being on the receiving end of bullying is something that can happen to anyone at any age, but as a teenager it can feel particularly overwhelming and negatively affect your life. The good news is that it doesn't have to ruin or define it, though, as many celebrities who were bullied when they were younger have gone on to prove.

Rapper Eminem used his experience of physical bullying as song inspiration and has been quoted as saying: "Even the biggest of stars have gone through bullying and survived it and, furthermore, have come out on top – so can you".

Surviving it doesn't mean just putting up and shutting up, however. In fact, it is essential to let someone know what's going on (see the box on called 'Don't suffer in silence' for more on this).

Also, there are things you can do to help with anxiety, build resilience and reduce the chances of being a target (although always remember that being bullied is not your fault and no one should feel forced to change their appearance or who they are).

SHOCKING STATISTICS

MORE THAN HALF OF 11 TO 16 YEAR OLDS IN THE UK HAVE BEEN BULLIED OVER THEIR APPEARANCE, WITH 40% TARGETED AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK.

HOW TO CALM YOUR MIND

Mindfulness and self-awareness are key tools, as experienced counsellor and trainer Pauline Couch explains. Her organisation, Step4ward, specialises in working with young people over various issues, including bullying. "When faced with a situation of bullying, our fight-or-flight state can get stuck between flight (escaping) and not knowing how to fight or what to say or do," she says. "This results in a state of obvious anxiety and stress, which in turn 'feeds' the bully's desire for a reaction. Being able to get into a state of relaxation quickly can reduce the panic considerably. Practising mindfulness and exercises like positive belly breathing (which enables more oxygen to enter the brain), even when not being threatened, will help the victim switch states at the time of any incidences.

"Focusing on internal senses, such as breathing, can also help break the cycle of upsetting thoughts after a distressing experience," Pauline adds. >

“Surviving it doesn’t mean just putting up and shutting up”

SWITCH THE FOCUS

Keeping a journal or writing down thoughts and feelings can be a helpful way of dealing with them. But when you've done that, try to change your focus.

London-based chartered clinical psychologist, Dr Abigael San, regularly uses mindful awareness techniques with clients, and suggests a basic distancing exercise: "Choose an object; something easily accessible like a stone or a pen, rather than a special belonging you might not always have around. Focus on it, noticing how it looks and feels in your hand. Allow other thoughts to come and go, recognising that they might be negative or distressing, but always returning your focus to the object and present moment. Do this for a few minutes at a time."

You can also distract yourself with positive things and places that uplift and calm you, like a creative activity or stroking a pet. Don't shut yourself away and become isolated. When your world feels as though it is shrinking, bullies can take on a much greater significance.

> "Distract yourself with positive things that uplift and calm you"

IN THE CLASSROOM

YOUNG PEOPLE BULLIED IN THE LAST YEAR REPORT THAT CLASSMATES ARE MOST LIKELY TO BULLY THEM, AT 62%, WITH 10% SAYING THE BULLY IS SOMEONE THEY ONLY KNOW ONLINE.

BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT

Bullies can easily leave their victims feeling as though they are worthless, but always try to remember that you're far from that; the problem lies within them, not you. Don't allow their words or actions to affect the basics you need to stay healthy. Guard against the trap of falling into seriously damaging habits, such as using drugs, alcohol or self-harming to numb or block out feelings. If you are already doing any of these, seek specific help to break the cycle.

If not eating due to anxiety is an issue, try a mindfulness technique before meal times to settle your stomach. If eating too much for comfort is an issue, explore alternative ways of self-soothing, such as watching a funny film or having a bath.

SLEEP IS SOUND

Without enough sleep, everything feels worse, and your ability to cope is affected. Distressing thoughts and anxiety will affect your ability to fall asleep. It can be tempting to end up doing lots of late-night browsing on social media as a result, but that won't help you to switch off.

Also, unwinding can be particularly difficult if you are experiencing bullying via social media and are on constant alert.

"Many young clients tell me they cannot turn their phone off at night 'in case it's my friend contacting me'", reports counsellor Pauline. "This is a way of thinking that a bully will be aware of and may exploit by targeting someone at their most vulnerable, in a place they usually feel safe. Even if this doesn't apply, it is healthy to set boundaries around checking texts and social media accounts."

STAND TALL

Feeling scared and intimidated naturally makes us want to shrink into a small ball in the corner of a room and hope that it makes us invisible. However, standing tall and appearing confident (even if you don't feel it) makes a big difference. If this is something you find difficult, you could consider self-defence classes – not to learn how to beat up the bullies (as appealing as the fantasy may be!), but to improve the way you feel and how you hold yourself.

Exercise also happens to be a fantastic way to deal with stress, and is certainly worth trying before mindfulness exercises, particularly if you find it difficult to sit still. Anything counts: walking, cycling, a team sport, even doing some stretches at home.

TALK IT THROUGH

Besides telling someone what is going on, talking things through with a trained professional can be worthwhile. Most schools now have in-house counselling services where students can refer themselves.

If the bullying takes place in school, you might prefer to see a counsellor in a different environment, such as a specialist youth service or a private practice counsellor. "I've noticed that when young people come for counselling out of school uniform, their demeanour and confidence is often quite different and can help the process," reveals Pauline.

HOW MINDFULNESS CAN BETTER THE BULLIES

Mindfulness techniques not only help those being bullied, they can reduce incidents of bullying. Research into bullying behaviour shows it is generally done impulsively, while bullies lack understanding and/or caring for how they affect others.

MINDFULNESS THIS

MindUP is a training programme based on mindful awareness, positive psychology and neuroscience, which has been taught in 350 schools across the US and more than 150 in the UK. The programme has been shown to improve students' self-control, reduce conflict between students, and strengthen resiliency. "By teaching the concepts of gratitude, empathy and connection, we are better able to understand and share the feelings of one another," explains MindUP's assistant director of education partnerships in the US, Mika Jain.

A small study carried out in Cleveland found that after attending an eight-week course based on the MindUP programme, pupils who had been bullying other students showed increased empathy and had better control of their emotions.

In San Francisco, two short meditation sessions were introduced into a school known for issues with violence resulting in suspensions decreasing by 75 percent.

DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE

Talking to someone about being bullied might feel almost as tough as dealing with the bullying itself, but it's essential

Even if you feel it will be upsetting or embarrassing to admit you are being bullied, don't let that, or any threats about speaking out, stop you. You could plan what you need to say or even write it down if you find that useful as a first step.

Who you tell will depend on who you feel most comfortable with – it could be a teacher, parent, another relative or maybe someone who leads a group you belong to. If you don't get the response or the help you hoped for, choose someone else and carry on until you do. If you need help with this, in addition to advice on dealing with bullying, there are numerous organisations that are set up to provide that, some with helplines or text services to contact in a crisis. If you ever feel in immediate, serious danger you should call 999 (UK) or 911 (US).

UK

Ditchthelabel.org is an international anti-bullying charity offering online help via digital mentors and a support forum. You can also call them on **01273 201129** between 9am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.

Actagainstbullying.org is a registered charity set up by the parent of a bullied child. It offers lots of advice for teenagers – you can also email them at **info@actagainstbullying.org**

Antibullyingpro.com has an online support centre and offers a 24/7 crisis messenger service for young people in the UK – text **DA** to **85258**.

Childline.org.uk has some great practical advice, including how to deal with different forms of online bullying and an under 18's helpline. It's free to call and lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week – **0800 1111**.

www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk can be contacted on **0845 225 5787**, Monday-Friday, 9am to 5pm, as well as 10am to 12pm on Saturdays. This organisation is aimed at both young people and their parents.

Giveusashout provides a crisis text support service for all ages – text **Shout** to **85258**.

US AND CANADA

1-800-668-6868
Canada Kids Help Phone can help with all sorts of mental health issues, offering access to counsellors, as well as plenty of online advice.

1-800-399-PEER
Bullyology deals with all aspects of bullyiing at all ages, with helplines for various countries. Visit the site at **bullyology.com** for more information.

Teen Line
teenlineonline.org/talk-now
Get help from other teenagers.

1-800-999-9999
Covenant House NineLine deals with crisis intervention and angry feelings.

1-800-784-2433
National Hopeline connects caller to a 24-hour crisis centre in the BC area.

IMAGES: GETTY

How to handle YOUR FAMILY

Both **being** and **living with** a teenager is **intensely stressful** for both parties

If being a teenager is the most stressful thing in the world, the second most stressful thing is probably living with one. This isn't your fault, but it's something that you may not appreciate until you are considerably older. Living with someone whose mood is constantly readjusting can be a challenge to say the least, and it's one that many families sometimes struggle with. This can lead to arguments or even full-on shouting matches, which is never a good thing.

What is perhaps most frustrating is that you are still learning the language to describe how you feel, and trying to tell other people exactly what you are feeling is a challenge. While some think this is all just an inevitable part of growing up, many feel that these situations can be ideally avoided, at least on most occasions.

Approaching this type of situation can feel tough, because once you realise you are in an argument, it feels impossible to leave it. That's why it is important to try to get into a mindful meditative state

on your own if you want to process these feelings in a different way. If you know something has upset you, make time to think about it later on, when you are on your own (schedule an alarm if necessary!). Sit in a way that is comfortable, and close your eyes. As always, focus on your breathing, or the sensation at the tips of your fingers. When stray thoughts intrude, simply acknowledge them and release them, without feeling the emotion that the thought has triggered. After you've been in this state for a few minutes, let your mind drift over to the member of the family you are having the particular disagreement with.

Think about who they are to you, and what kind of connection or relationship you have. It's important to stay in a neutral state if you can. If something rises that will make you feel angry, visualise the thought on a leaf held by the tips of your fingers. Read the thought, then let the leaf go and dismiss it. Once you've done this a few times, perhaps with the same thought, think about what they are feeling, again without any of the emotional responses like anger or guilt. You have a limited ability to change how they think, so it's best to focus on how you can handle the issue, neutrally. After doing this a few times, hopefully you'll be in a place where the thought of your family member doesn't automatically raise those negative feelings.

ANCIENT TEENS

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MOANING ABOUT TEENAGERS SINCE ANCIENT GREECE, SO IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A DIFFICULT STATE TO BE IN!

When you lose control

What happens during a meltdown and how you can avoid it

What is a meltdown/what are the causes?

A meltdown simply means your emotions are out of control, and you may say things that you later regret to your family, friends or co-workers.

What is going on when it happens?

Your emotions feel more intense now than they will do as an adult, which means situations that shouldn't upset you too much will upset you greatly. The emotion overspills and suddenly you can't control what you've said.

Learn to notice your triggers

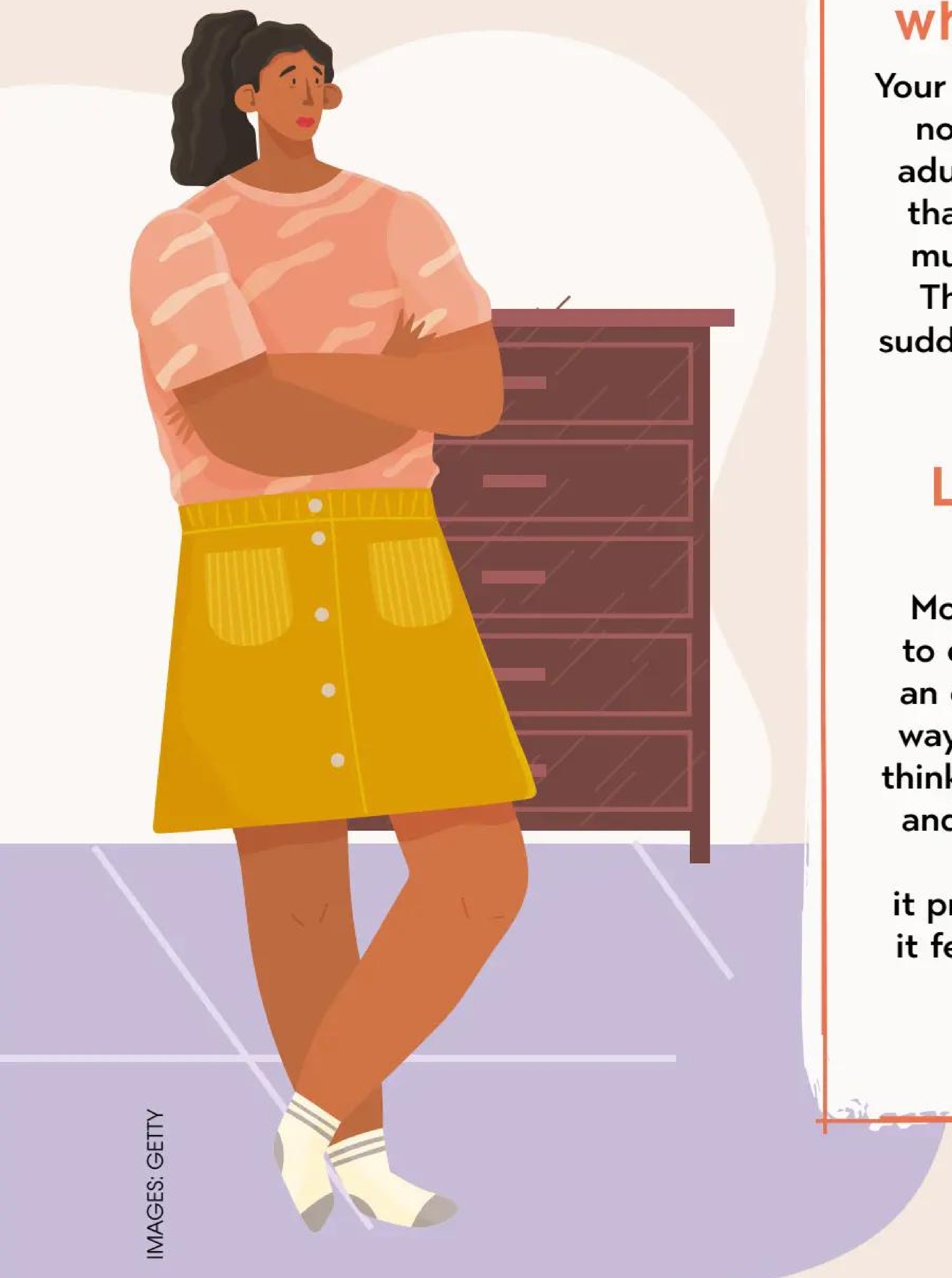
Most adults don't know how to do this properly, so it isn't an easy thing to do. The best way to do this is with mindful thinking. Consider the situation and assess each thought and what type of emotion it provokes, and how intensely it feels (without taking on the emotional state).

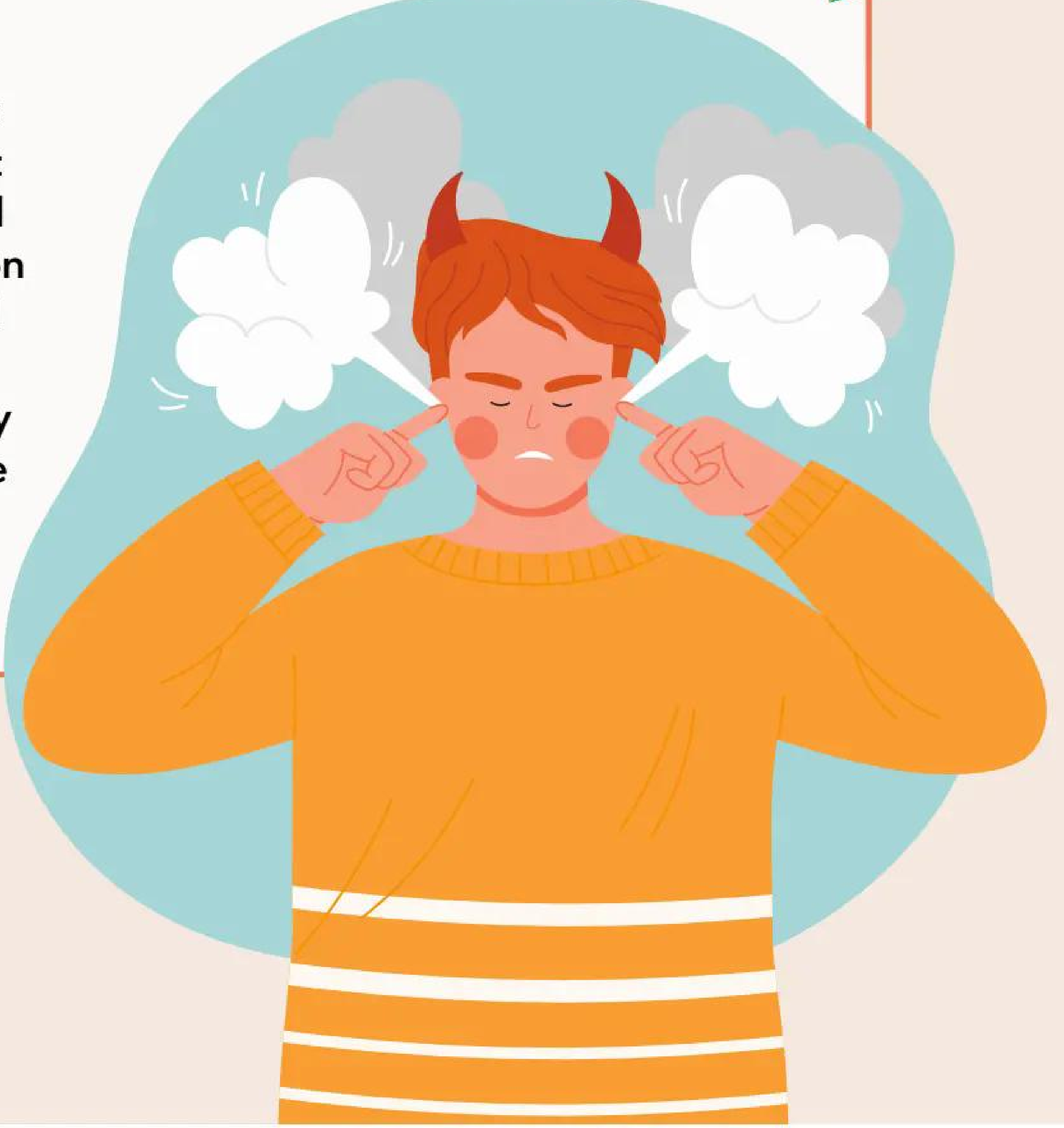
How to let off steam

One method is mindful thinking, but there are other ways, such as exercising, relaxing with a show you like, or venting about it to friends. Perhaps even make plans for your life beyond the place you're living right now.

Fix things

You might feel that you have said something you can never take back, but in truth most adults know exactly what you are experiencing, and will forgive you. If you can talk to the person afterwards (after the right amount of time has passed) and try to clear the air, then try to explain why you had a meltdown.





IMAGES: GETTY

Dealing with PRESSURE about the FUTURE

Whether it's **exam stress** or worrying about where you'll go **after school,** staying mindful can help

Pressure leads to stress, a natural and extremely unhelpful state of alertness. The only time stress is truly useful is in a physical life-or-death situation, but otherwise it simply makes it harder to concentrate. Whatever the situation is, wherever the pressure is coming from, letting the stress build up is not the best way to succeed. One common pressure point for teenagers is uncertainty about the future, or possibly not knowing what route to take when leaving school. This can be made even more stressful when preparing to take exams, submit coursework with a deadline, or preparing for job interviews. The one (slight) silver lining is that this kind of pressure is likely to be something you'll face occasionally during the next stage of your life, and you will find that life is all the easier to handle if you are already able to constructively deal with being under pressure.

Mindful thinking is a good way to relieve pressure, and deal with anxious thoughts before they get out of control. Start by giving yourself some time to yourself, ideally somewhere quiet. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. When intrusive thoughts appear, simply acknowledge them, but then let them go. If they involve anxiety, try not to take the emotion on board. Breathe out, and let the thought go. Take the time to allow yourself to stay in this state, not focusing on anything but your breathing. Give your mind a break from anxiety. When you are ready to get on, keep those anxious thoughts at bay.

Any difficult task is best done when you're not in a strong emotion, particularly one that makes the task harder. If you feel yourself getting anxious again, just close your eyes and breathe deeply for a few seconds. It's important not to let the anxiety take hold, if possible.

How to deal with pressure

Whether it's an exam or picking a university, don't let your stress build up indefinitely

EAT WELL, SLEEP WELL

It is simply easier to handle difficult tasks and stressful situations when your body feels good. Eating cleanly (see our ideas for five healthy breakfasts) and getting a good night's sleep is excellent for your body. One good way to achieve restful sleep is to avoid phone use after a certain time and not do anything else on your bed (homework, revision, socialising, etc) other than sleep, or read a book.

LATE NIGHT STUDYING

USING YOUR PHONE AT NIGHT KEEPS THE BRAIN ACTIVE, MAKING SLEEP HARDER. CONSIDER USING A 'NIGHT FILTER', WHICH CHANGES THE SCREEN TO BE MORE FRIENDLY TO THE EYES.

MEDITATION IS FREE AND THERAPEUTIC

This can be in the form of simple mindful thinking in a dark room, or it can be with a guided meditation app. It can be where you study, or where you rest, or even in the garden! A number of the guided meditation apps are freely available, and are recommended as part of living a stress-free lifestyle (and can also help with sleeping well, which is very important).

TAKE A CREATIVE BREAK

Whatever you're doing, make sure you make time for yourself to have a break. But rather than putting the TV on, why not use the creative parts of your brain? Whether doodling, singing, playing an instrument, making art, or writing, give your brain a well needed stretch doing something that doesn't invite stress or anxiety. This keeps your mind active, in a way that watching TV simply doesn't do.

POSITIVE AND MINDFUL SELF-TALK

Taking the time to give yourself a pep talk might sound corny, but it is worth trying. When in a state of mindfulness, simply vocalise what your goals are, and how you're going to achieve them. Use realistic stepping stones to get to where you want to go, remaining both objective and positive ("I'm taking the time to prepare and by doing so, I'm going into this exam/interview confident and will do better").

GO FOR A WALK

Stretching your legs can also help stretch your mind. If you're prone to worrying when walking, consider using one of the meditation apps to help keep your mind centred. Walking near nature also helps to keep your pressures in perspective, reminding yourself that there is a bigger world out there beyond whatever is causing you stress.

Do a senses drill

Use this guided meditation exercise to deliberately bring your attention to the present in order to build your resilience to pressure in exams and other stressful situations and events

One

Pause what you are doing and take two deep breaths.

Two

Look around you and silently name the first three things that you can see.

Three

Now silently name three things that you can hear.

Four

Focus on your body and silently name three things that you can feel, (warmth, tingling, or coolness, for example).

Five

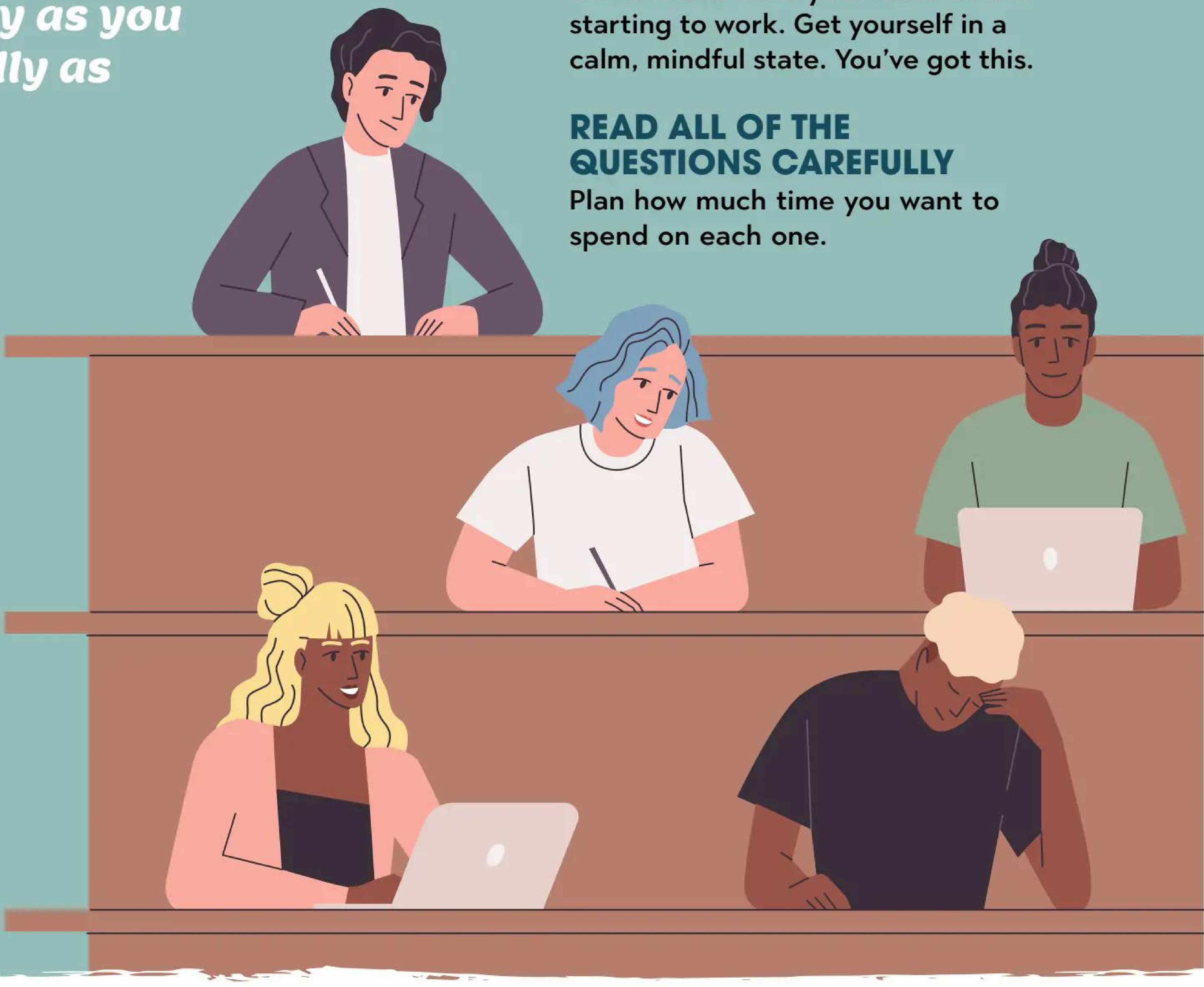
Next bring your attention to what you can smell and taste, noticing what you experience.

Six

Take two deep breaths to signify the end of the exercise.

HOW TO HANDLE Exam days

Preparing to take your exams can be done in the same way as you do your revision — ideally as calmly as possible



PREPARE FOR EXAM DAY THE NIGHT BEFORE

Set your alarm, iron/lay out your clothes, and pack what you'll need for the exam (pens, calculator, etc) in your bag. If you have a packed lunch, make it the evening before. Don't leave anything for yourself to worry about in the morning – if you can do it in advance, do it.

HAVE A GOOD BREAKFAST

Don't go in on an empty stomach.

BEFORE THE EXAM

If you have time to read cue cards on the subject, have a refreshing glance through – but don't try and do a full cram session beforehand.

WHEN STARTING THE EXAM

Breathe and clear your mind before starting to work. Get yourself in a calm, mindful state. You've got this.

READ ALL OF THE QUESTIONS CAREFULLY

Plan how much time you want to spend on each one.

5 healthy breakfasts

A great day starts with a great meal. Go for something healthy and filling to keep your mind and body strong

TURMERIC OATS

- 50 g | 1.75 oz | 0.3 cup porridge oats
- 200 ml | 7 fl oz | 0.75 cup milk of your choice
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- Your own choice of topping (for example, almonds, sliced apple, ground linseed)

Cook the porridge oats in the milk as per the packet instructions, either on the hob or in the microwave to your preferred consistency. Stir in 1 tsp ground turmeric and serve immediately, with your choice of toppings.

OVERNIGHT OATS

- 50 g | 1.75 oz | 0.3 cup porridge oats
- 2 tbsp plain Greek yoghurt
- 100 ml | 3.5 fl oz | 0.5 cup milk of your choice
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- Choice of fruit to top
- 1 tsp nut butter

Put your oats in a bowl, jar or reusable container – it needs to have a lid. Add the yogurt, milk and cinnamon. Stir, cover and leave in the fridge overnight. The next day you can eat it cold or warm through on the hob or in the microwave. Top with the fruit and nut butter.

> “Breathe and clear your mind before starting”

IF AN ESSAY IS NEEDED

Spend a few minutes working through a plan, with how much time/space to spend on each section. Give yourself more space than you need.

CHECK THE CLOCK

Occasionally check the time to see when to wrap up a question and start the next one, but try not to become fixated on it. It’s only a guide.

IF ONE OF THE QUESTIONS FEELS VERY PROMISING

Feel free to do this first, but don’t spend more time than is appropriate on it. Make a good plan and stick to it, don’t spend twice as much time working on the question you feel confident about unless the answer is worth twice the amount of marks.

IF YOU HAVE TIME TO RE-READ YOUR ANSWERS

Have a look through. If you want to clarify something, add it as a footnote rather than crossing it out (use an *).

AFTER THE EXAM

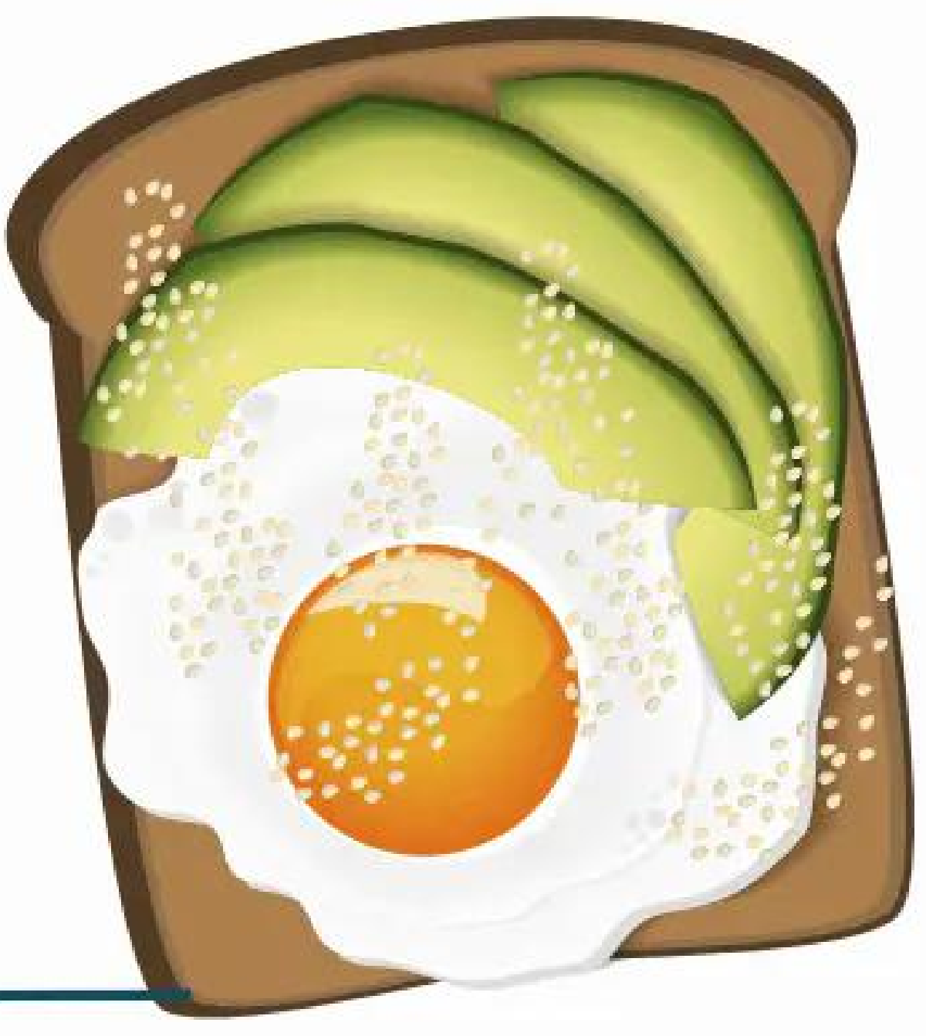
Relax. There’s nothing to be gained from going over your answers after the exam. Have a break, then when calm, prepare for the next exam.

COMBATING STRESS

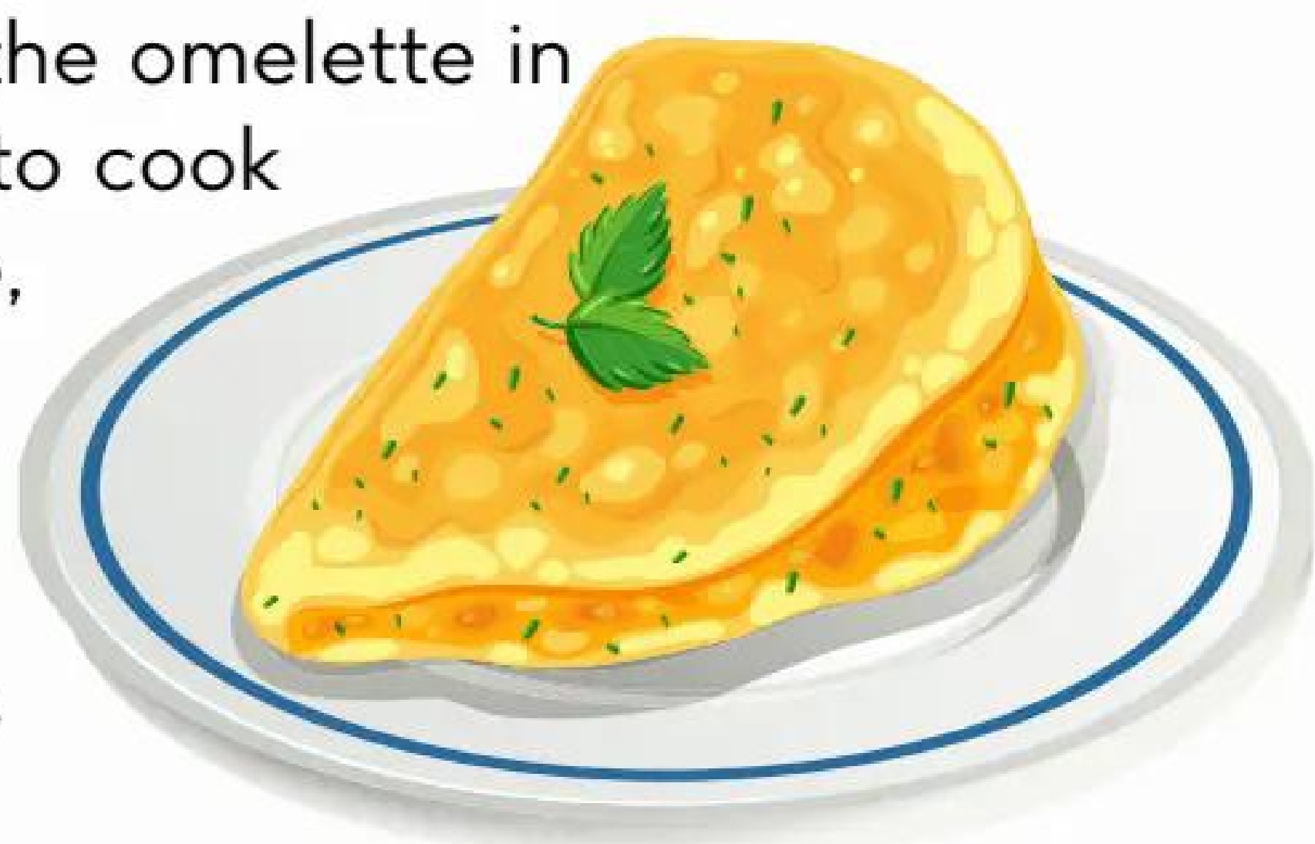
IF THE CAUSE OF STRESS IS NOT TREATED, IT CAN LEAD TO ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND OTHER MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS, SO TAKE ACTION.

CHEESE AND SPINACH OMELETTE

- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 2 tsp grated Parmesan
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Large handful of baby spinach



Mix the eggs with the grated Parmesan. Heat the oil in a frying pan and add the egg mixture. Cook until almost set and add the spinach. Fold the omelette in half and continue to cook for another minute, until it is cooked throughout and golden brown. Serve immediately.



AVOCADO AND EGG ON TOAST

- 1 slice wholegrain bread
- 1 large egg
- Half an avocado, skin removed
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- Black pepper to season

Toast your bread. Meanwhile, poach the egg to your liking. Dice the avocado and use a fork to smash it, adding the lemon juice and a little black pepper. Serve the toast with the smashed avocado and poached egg, plus a pinch of black pepper to taste.

NUT BUTTER BAGEL

- 1 seeded wholegrain bagel
- 1 tbsp nut butter
- 1 banana sliced
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Toast the bagel lightly, then spread with your choice of nut butter. Add the sliced banana and sprinkle with the cinnamon to serve.

Feeling THE PRESSURE TO SUCCEED

When you're feeling the strain of other people's expectations, remember to take a mental break

Depending on where you are in your education, you may feel that parents/parental figures place a lot of expectation on you to do very well in your exams, perhaps they are already talking about which universities you should be applying for. This can be a source of pressure, and it's possible that your parents/teachers might not see if you are becoming stressed. If you feel you can talk to them about the reasonable expectations they should have, then you should do so. It will take some of the pressure off, as well as put them in a better position to help you with your revision (easing up on chores in exam week, for example). If you struggle with inner confidence, think about the extracurricular things that you enjoy out of school, things that you know you are good at. If you are good at one thing, then with preparation there is no reason to not be good at another thing. Above all, try to stay in a centred and mindful place when considering the potential outcome of your results. Whatever happens, you can handle it, and you know that staying calm and collected is much more likely to help you approach your exams as best you can.

> "Stay in a centred and mindful place when considering your results"

Dealing with an uncertain future

When nothing is certain in the world, it can feel there's no point in planning

The frustrating thing about the future is that even when you spend a lot of time planning, there may still be an event beyond your control that changes everything. Knowing this can make the thought of planning for your future feel risky, or even futile, but deciding to not plan for anything at all isn't a winning strategy. Instead, why not think about which path you ultimately would like to take in life, and what small steps you're doing now that can help make this more likely? For some careers, an early commitment to volunteering or work experience is an excellent way to get ahead, or perhaps being able to demonstrate you have the same skill set that they may look for in new employees.

Having an idea of the sort of person you want to be is something that you can build up to. For example, if you want to be more competitive or a team player (if you have business aspirations), then learning to play a team sport will help develop both of those attributes. Take the time to really consider the kind of person you want to be, and think about the small steps that can get you there.

Woohoo
XO
YAY
OMG

IMAGE SOURCES: GETTY

A guide to

Mindful REVISION

Efficient revision is tough, but it doesn't need to be stressful

Knowing how to revise without stress is a skill you'll use for the rest of your life. Whether academically, for interviews, or when meeting someone high up in your company, retaining knowledge is a great way to set yourself up for success. During exam periods, however, revision can be a time that is very stressful. Stress is the result of anxiety and unfortunately, anxiety is an emotion that doesn't respond to fact, and runs out of control easily. Remember, that while you might be anxious for a good reason (you might not do well in an exam), the fact you are anxious actively makes it harder! You're in a cycle where worrying means it's harder to revise, which makes you even more worried, and so on. The best thing to do is to break the cycle of worry, and this is where mindful thinking can be a great tool when going over your notes.

CALM AND CLEAR-HEADED

WHERE IS IMPORTANT, WHEN IS EVEN MORE SO. REVISE WHEN YOU FEEL MOST REFRESHED!

Take the time to clear your mind. Breathe. When anxious thoughts appear, acknowledge them, but then release them without focusing on them. Do this for a few minutes. Ignore the thought that you need to start revision right now – ten minutes isn't going to make a difference to your grade.

When you start revising, after you have been calm for a few minutes, do so mindfully. If you read something you don't understand, don't panic. Read it again. If it's a big subject, make the time to go over it later, and move to the next item. Letting yourself get anxious will not be the way you do well, it will probably achieve the opposite. The calmer you are during your revision, the calmer you'll be in the exam.

> "The best thing to do is to break the cycle of worry"

Mindful Revision tips

How you revise best is down to you, and it's worth considering what you can do to make it as productive as possible

Tip one:

MAKE A PLAN

The more time you have to revise, the better prepared you will be. If you can, however much time you have to revise, give yourself the first 60% of time to cover everything once, and the last 40% to go back over the topics you're less familiar with.

Tip two:

FIND OUT WHERE YOUR WEAK SPOTS IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE ARE

Do this when making your plan, so that you know exactly what areas you need to go over again. If you can speak to someone who is stronger on an area you're worried about (such as a teacher or other student). then make time to do so.

Tip three:

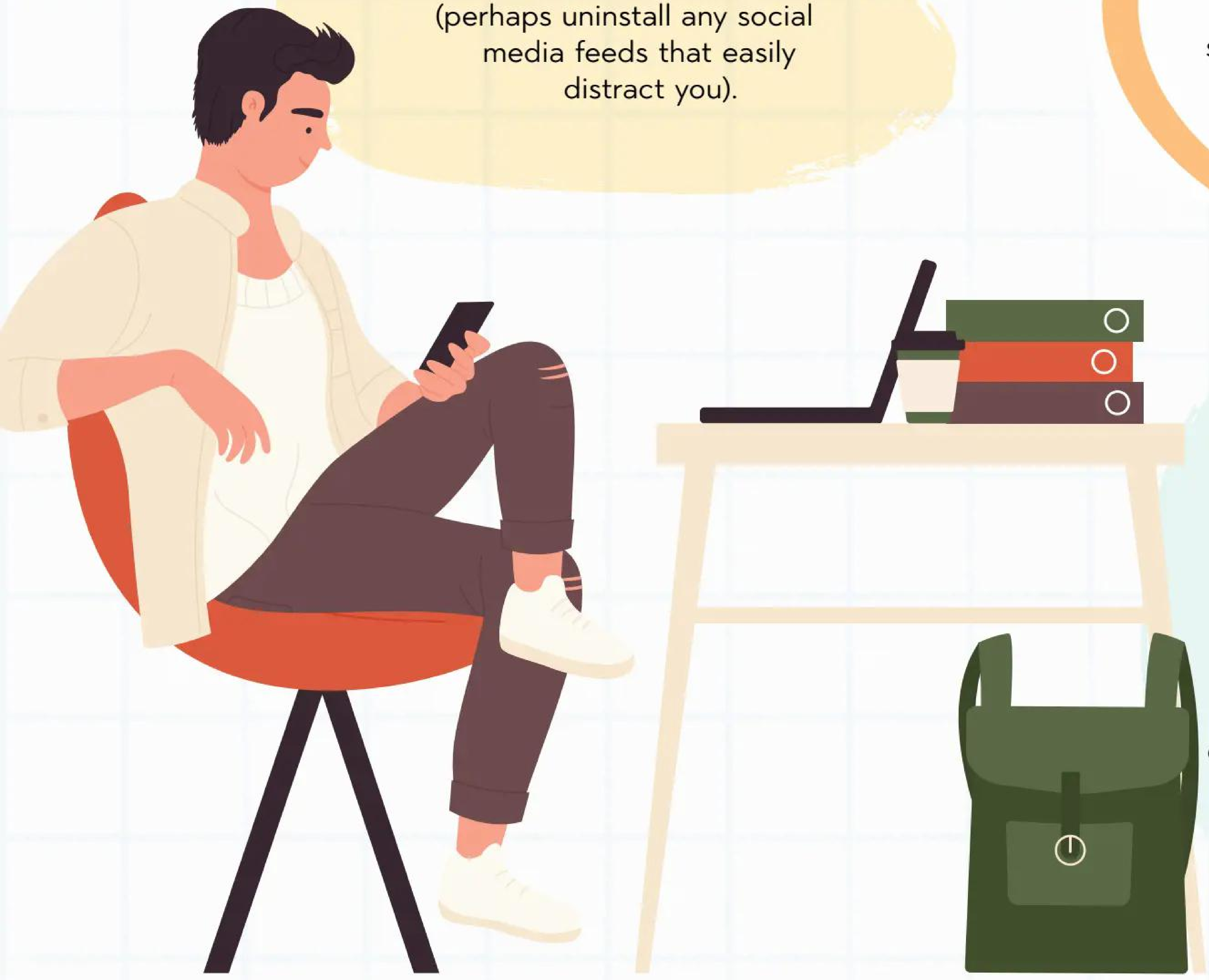
TURN OFF YOUR NOTIFICATIONS

Put your phone on silent, make sure no notifications will appear (perhaps uninstall any social media feeds that easily distract you).

Tip four:

CHOOSE A GOOD PLACE FOR YOUR REVISION

Find somewhere that is quiet, but also somewhere you can sit comfortably without fidgeting. Where that may be is entirely dependent on you – just make sure you can concentrate easily.



Tip five:

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED

If music helps you revise, get a good playlist for helping you to concentrate. If it doesn't, don't start trying it now. Plan when you are going to eat so you don't get distracted and try to keep pets away from you.

Tip six:

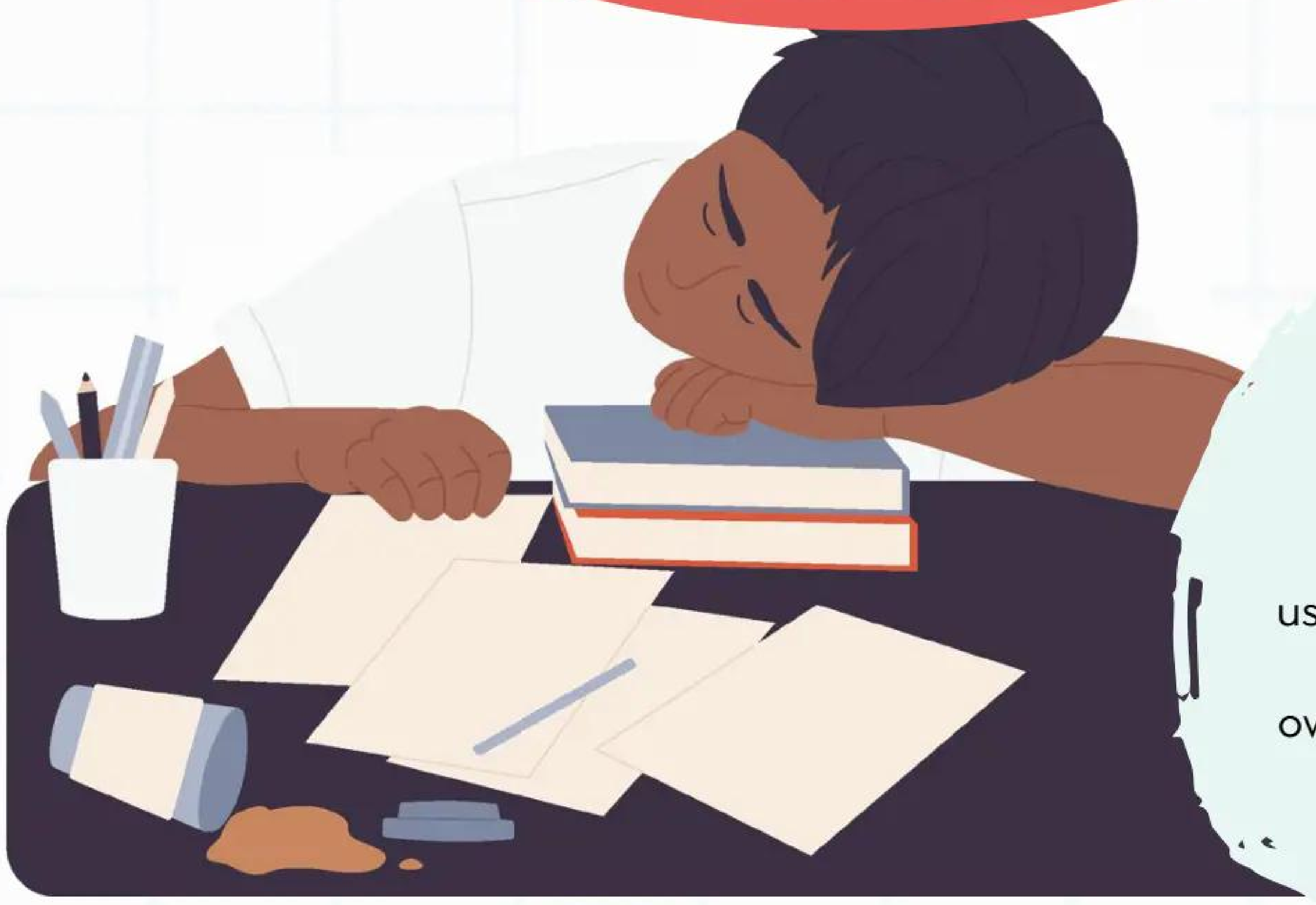
TAKE BREAKS WHEN YOU NEED THEM

It's good to have a scheduled break, but if you feel that the information is not going in, it's okay to bump it forward a bit. Take a refresher, and then get back to the books.

Tip seven:

EXERCISE

Going for a run or short workout if you've got a long break scheduled is a good way to let your brain take a rest, and get any excess stress out of your body. Not too much, just enough to give the mind a bit of a shake-up. You don't want to be too tired to carry on reading and making notes!



Tip eight:

IT'S THE QUALITY OF REVISION THAT COUNTS

Not the quantity. It's better to do short bursts of intense, useful revision rather than a long slog through a topic where no information actually stays in the brain. You know your own pace best, so make sure you design a revision plan that works for you – one you know you can stick to!

COLOUR CODE FOR EASE

USING A PERSONAL COLOUR CODE CAN MAKE IT EASIER TO HELP FORM ASSOCIATIONS IN YOUR MIND.

Tip nine:

BUILD UP YOUR CONFIDENCE

When you've got a subject clear in your head, take the time to congratulate yourself! Keep it relative to how happy you were with the subject before you started. If a concept has only just made itself clear to you, then this really is a bonus and you should reflect on that.

Tip ten:

MEDITATE

Perhaps before revision, perhaps afterwards, why not both? Keep your mind centred, and remind yourself when it is time to start and stop revising. If you've done what you need to for the day, or you know that more revision would stress you out, unfocus the mind. Think about your breathing, and let your brain get into a mindful state.

> "It's better to do short bursts of intense revision"

IMAGE SOURCES · GETTY

Why we should all keep a JOURNAL

Everyone, it seems, is writing down their thoughts and memories. But journalling is about so much more – it can uplift, inspire and help you feel grateful for your life

From Samuel Pepys to Adrian Mole and Bridget Jones – what's not to love about a great diary? Years pass and times change but there's something constant and comforting about picking up a pen and keeping a record, even if it's for your eyes only.

These days, however, it's all about the journal – modern-day diary-keeping with a focus on goals and self-improvement, reflection and wellness, problem-solving and creativity. This is not just an account of what you did and felt today. It's affordable DIY therapy. "Writing things down helps us identify and clarify what we're thinking and feeling," says counsellor Jo Bisseker Barr, who runs writing for wellness courses from her Hampshire home. "Keeping a journal is a very simple way to reflect. It's illuminating and therapeutic," she adds.

Writing in a journal can ease anxiety by stopping thoughts ruminating in your head and making you pay attention to what's around you –

> “It’s a very simple way to reflect — illuminating and therapeutic”

mindfulness in written form if you will. And don’t worry if you’re not a writer – you can doodle, make lists, attach images, and create mind maps.

In fact, many people turn their journals into works of art, with colourful lists and cropped photos, all bordered by patterned washi tape or stickers. Which is great, as studies show that people who engage in an artistic pursuit are healthier and less depressed than those who don’t, according to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

And you don’t have to be Rembrandt. A study by America’s Drexel University found that creating an artwork (even a simple drawing) reduces the amount of stress hormone, cortisol, in your body.

“Creative activities can help us switch off from day-to-day pressures and turn negative feelings into something positive,” says Stephen Buckley from mental health charity, Mind. “Arts therapies are an effective treatment for mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.”

The health benefits of journalling may be physical too – cutting your body’s levels of stress hormones can help your heart, brain and immune system. Researchers at the University of Arizona found that keeping a journal after a divorce lowered people’s heart rate and helped them make sense of their experience emotionally. And while you don’t tend to bump in to many divorced teenagers, these benefits hold for anyone, whatever their experience.

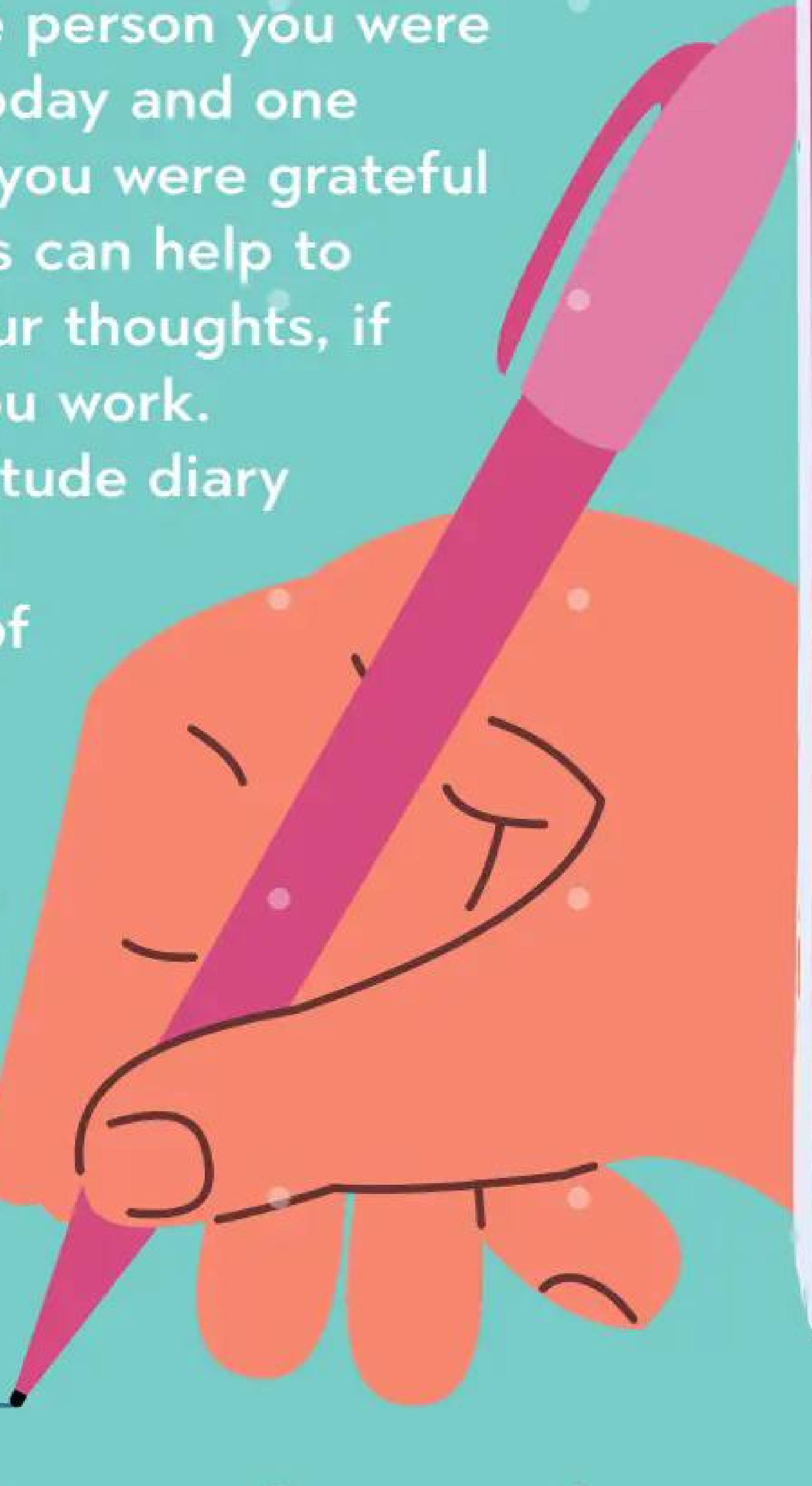
A study by the University of Lancaster suggests writing down your experiences helps you remember them later, making diary-keeping useful in delaying age-related memory loss. And Dr James Pennebaker, author of *Opening Up by Writing It Down*, found that journalling can boost immunity by strengthening T cells.

A good place to begin your journalling journey is starting with a gratitude diary. As the name suggests, the aim is to help you focus on the things you are grateful for. So rather than obsessing on problems at school or an argument with a friend or parent, you instead turn your attention to a good thing in your life. There is no set format to a gratitude diary, though you can buy ones with handy headers and ideas to prompt your thoughts. All you really need, though, is five minutes a day with a notepad and pen.

Write down anything good that happens in your day. You could carry it with you and journal something as soon as it happens, or you could make it a regular part of your pre-bedtime routine. There is no limit to the things you can cover. Did you have a nice walk to school? Write it down. Did you manage a task for the first time? Write it down. It can be big things and small things. A gratitude diary is only for noting down the positives, to build up a resource that you can pull out whenever you feel down so you can look back on the good things that have happened to you.

If you prefer a structured approach, you could work to a set format in your gratitude diary. You could list five things that you were grateful for today, one person you were grateful for today and one personal skill you were grateful for today. This can help to streamline your thoughts, if that is how you work.

Both a gratitude diary and a journal give a sense of perspective, which can be difficult to achieve when you are at the mercy of teenage hormones!



GETTING STARTED

Worried about what to write or finding the time? Here’s how to get going…

Write a to-do list

The satisfaction of getting organised and the sense of achievement when drawing a line through completed tasks is reward in itself.

List three good things about your day

US research shows that being grateful can help you shift a negative mindset so that you feel happier and sleep better.

List three things you’re looking forward to tomorrow

“Envisaging a positive future is fundamental for increased happiness and wellbeing,” says positive psychologist Miriam Akhtar, author of *The Little Book of Happiness*.

Feel daunted by a book of blank pages?

Choose a structured journal with questions to answer and tasks and lists to complete. Maybe try Michelle Obama’s *Becoming: A Guided Journal for Discovering Your Voice* (Viking).

Use a special pen

You can use any pen, but having one dedicated to your journal helps you slip into that mindset. Experiment with different nib widths and choose no-bleed options for fragile-papered bullet journals. For an arty look, try specialist calligraphy pens.

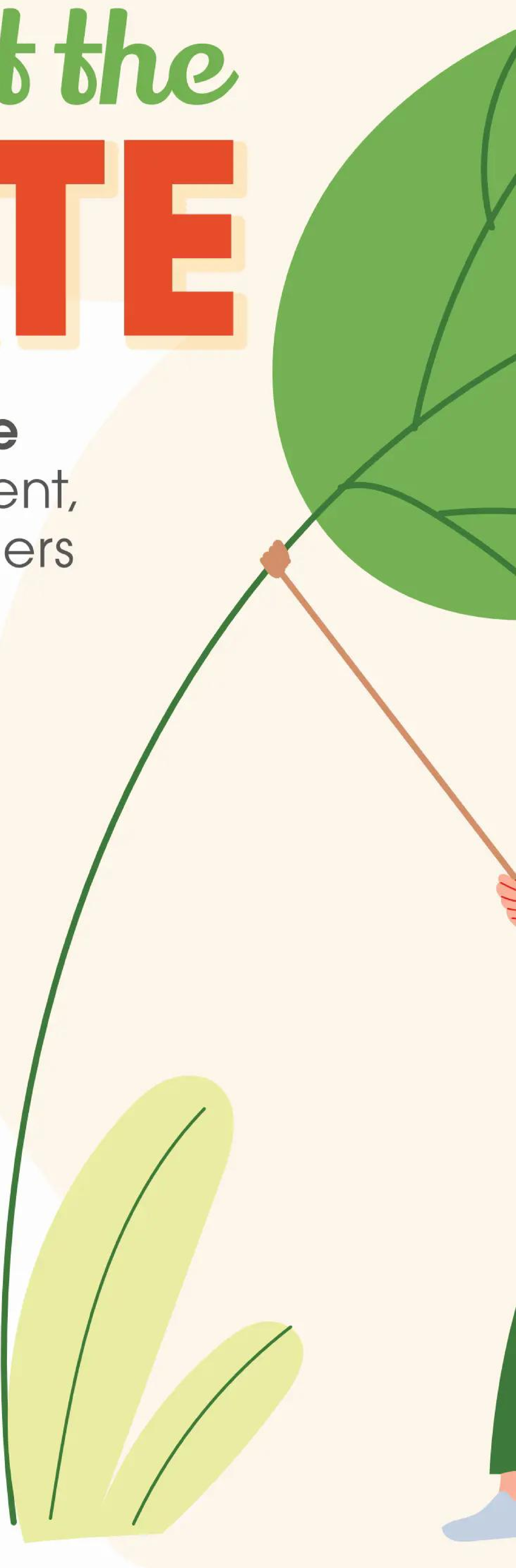
© Getty

Concerned about the CLIMATE

With the effects of **climate change** becoming more and more apparent, it's no wonder that today's teenagers **are anxious about their future**

You would have to live in a cave not to know that the world is in trouble. Today's young people don't live in caves: they're the most connected generation in history. And what they see heading down the train tracks towards them is unstoppable climate change – changes that will profoundly affect their lives while barely impacting the lives of the people now in charge. So it's little surprise that surveys of young people have found that they are deeply unimpressed with the lack of action of our political leaders while also suffering from increasing levels of anxiety about the future of the planet and their own futures within that context. A 2021 study in *The Lancet* that surveyed 10,000 young people around the world found that 59 per cent of them were extremely or very worried about climate change. What's more, their anxiety about the planet translated into feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, anger, guilt, helplessness and sadness. These feelings were so intense that 45 per cent of the young people in the survey said they affected their everyday lives.

This is eco anxiety, the new complex for the 21st century. While not a recognised mental disorder, it's clear that worry about the future has become a large part of the lives of many teenagers and young people around the world. One of the key features of *The Lancet* survey was its international reach. This showed that eco anxiety is by no means confined to rich children in the West. In fact, it was the young people of



> "Eco anxiety is not confined to the West"

PART 1

Reasons to be Cheerful

IT'S NOT ALL GLOOM AND DOOM

Contrary to what's often reported, the amount of tree coverage on the planet is actually increasing. A report, published in *Nature* in 2018, which was based on a careful analysis of satellite photographs, showed that between 1983 and 2018 an area of 2.24 million square kilometres went over to tree and forest cover. That's over nine times the surface area of the United Kingdom. While it's true that there was tree loss in the tropics, this was greatly offset by a huge increase in tree growth in temperate, mountainous, boreal and polar regions. Tree growth was down to a decrease in lands used for agriculture in these regions as well as a by-product of climate change: warmer weather means that trees can grow in areas that were previously too cold for them.

PART 2

Reasons to be Cheerful

THE WHALES ARE BACK

Industrial whaling drove many species of whale to the brink of extinction. To take one example, in the mid-1960s there were only 5,000 or so humpback whales left in the oceans. But with the whaling ban, their numbers have steadily increased. Now, the world population of humpback whales is estimated at 185,000 and increasing. Most whale species are steadily recovering, although they face danger from ship collisions. It's worth bearing in mind that environmental success stories tend to be downplayed by green campaigning organisations as they do not bring in the funds.

the Philippines and India, at 84 and 68 per cent respectively, who were most worried, compared to 49 per cent in the UK and 46 per cent in the USA.

So the anxiety is real, as is the resulting stress. But stress is the body's way of telling us that we need to do something: there's potential danger ahead and we've got to get ready for it. That was all very well when the potential danger was a lion hunting our ancestors. They faced a simple choice: fight, flight or freeze. But our bodies are still programmed for the same range of actions and, of the three, fight provides the best avenue towards overcoming the feelings of helplessness that accompany eco anxiety.

While surveys like that in *The Lancet* show the extent of worry among teenagers for the state of the world, they also show that it's this age group that is most prepared to do what is necessary to save the planet. Action is the corrective to feelings of helplessness. But with the scale of the problem so vast, it's easy to think that one person's actions will make no difference. And, of course, that's true. But when you combine one teenager's actions with those of hundreds of millions of others, all equally committed to changing the world, then the actions mount up, becoming an unstoppable wave of change.

These actions start at the most personal level, by altering our own lives so that we reduce our carbon footprint. This can be making small changes, such as walking or cycling to and from school instead of taking the bus to switching to buying secondhand clothing and suggesting domestic holidays rather than flying to faraway destinations.

Beyond the personal, you can link up with other like-minded people to work for change. Today, with the communications available to teenagers, it's possible to do this in a way that was impossible before. Some of the most impressive campaigns have involved teenagers from different cultures and countries working together to mitigate the effects of climate change, from cooperating to reduce deforestation to fighting for fair trade for small, third-world farmers against the rapacity of multinational corporations.

Not only do such actions empower people, they are the only way to bring about true and lasting change. As Martin Luther King said when fighting for civil rights in America, "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step."

PART 3

Reasons to be Cheerful

YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT IT BAD

There were times in the past when you could really claim that you'd been born at a bad time. Be born in 1900 and you'd spend almost your entire teenage years fighting, and dying, in the First World War. If you managed to survive the war the next whammy came just as the fighting ended, when the Spanish Flu epidemic killed millions more, somewhere between 25 and 50 million people, particularly targeting the young and healthy. Then, from 1929 to 1939, the world suffered the Great Depression, throwing millions into poverty, only to promptly enter the Second World War in 1939! And that wasn't even the worst time to be born. If your birthday was around 1335, then you'd be a teenager during the Black Death and you'd get to see half the people around you die in agony. Not even the worst prognoses for the future compare to these levels of mortality.

> "Action is the corrective to feelings of helplessness"

PART 4

Reasons to be Cheerful

WE'RE FATTER THAN EVER

That might not seem like a reason to be cheerful but it is. For sometime around about 2008, the world passed a milestone: more people were fat than were starving. Being overweight is not obviously something to cheer about but it's a hell of a lot better than the alternative. According to the World Health Organisation, nearly 2 billion people in the world are overweight (out of a world population of 8 billion) while 828 million went hungry. The numbers of people starving, after declining steadily, have risen over the last two years because some government policies against covid worldwide had a dreadful impact on the world's poor people. But there are still many, many more people with full bellies than with empty bellies today – and this is first time that has occurred in the history of the world.

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES. WORDS: EDOARDO ALBERT

Real-life CLUTTER

...and how to get it under control

Shhh, quick! One of your parents is coming up the stairs to check your radiator. You survey the scene; your room looks like a tornado has struck. There's a mountain of clean and dirty laundry on the chair you never use, a pile of crockery precariously perched on your shelf, books and school work everywhere and chocolate wrappers all over the floor. Well, teenage life involves more important priorities than keeping a tidy room, right? And you're pretty sure it was tidy not that long ago... wasn't it?

Time to take action! You quickly open your wardrobe and cram in anything you can grab, then sweep the crockery, books, and litter under your bed in the most stealthy manoeuvre of your life. With a few seconds to spare, you spritz your body spray in the air, expertly fan out your duvet and sit back down at your laptop like nothing ever happened. Does this sound familiar? Do you shut your bedroom door firmly behind you when you leave the house, and only open it just enough to squeeze through so as to hide the carnage on the other side? Do you constantly live in fear that your parents will discover your messy secret? Not only does this constant fear of being discovered pry on your mind and cause unnecessary stress, but clutter and mindfulness don't really go hand-in-hand. Sleep, your mood, ability to revise, and more, can all be severely affected by the clutter you have surrounded yourself with. As Vicky Silverthorn, author of *Start With Your Sock Drawer*, explains, "Clutter is like one giant to-do list of stuff constantly surrounding you in a place that should make you feel>

IMAGE SOURCES GETTY

Which kind of clutterer are you?

Vicky Silverthorn (youneedavicky.com) breaks down the six kinds of clutterer

The storer

You spend more buying storage solutions than what your stuff is actually worth.

The shover

You've run out of space because you're storing things you don't need.

The forgetter

You live by the mantra 'out of sight, out of mind' and have a secret 'messy' cupboard.

The stacker

Paperwork, books, dirty dishes... If it's neat, then it really isn't clutter. Right?

The blitzer

You leave things to build up for months before doing a big clear out.

The blinkered

Your clutter has been around for so long, it's part of the furniture.

calm, relaxed and in control". But it's important not to get overwhelmed. "This fear of it all being too much is one of the reasons people don't get started," she explains. "I always say, 'start small' with a corner, cupboard or drawer, and stop yourself from continuing unless you know you have a little more energy and time to spare." Helen Sanderson, professional organiser and coach (**helensanderson.com**), agrees. "Clutter is a pile of decisions that have not been made; things that have been put off until tomorrow, avoided and stepped over until they build up. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with stuff, but clutter becomes an issue in our homes when it starts to impact on you practically or emotionally."

Your personal space reflects your state of mind, too. A well-organised individual that never loses items of clothing, never forgets an important step and knows where key paperwork lives tends to operate better in life.

"Feeling ashamed of your home is often a symptom of low self-esteem," says Helen, "but you can use taking care of your home as a way of learning to nurture yourself".

Getting rid of stuff can be liberating and change the way you look at future purchases. Helen believes it gives us a new energy or 'lust for life'. People tell her they feel a surge of power and, often, significant things start to shift in other areas – relationships improve and possibilities open up.

But what's causing this clutter? Lots, Vicky believes, is a result of our attitude to buying. "My home is far from empty, but I consider myself to be pretty minimal in many ways," she says. "I don't shop for stuff frequently, getting paid and then spending it online isn't my thing, and I avoid gimmicky sales like the plague. When you shop mindfully,

> "Clutter is like one giant to-do list of stuff constantly surrounding you"

it feels great. To me, a treat is an experience, not an object."

Helen agrees: "Some of us have a hunter-gatherer instinct and live to collect things, which was fine when we gathered berries for dinner, but not when you have to have every single appliance or gadget, many of which you rarely or never use. Filling yourself with something from the outside will never fill your soul with happiness – we all know that, don't we?"

You might feel that buying tons of storage is essential for your decluttering journey, but Nicola Lewis of **thisgirlcanorganise.com** believes this is where many of us go wrong early on. "You need to eliminate the excess first," she explains. "This will give you more room for the things you do use in your home, showcasing the items that make you smile."

Many of us have insufficient storage space or haven't made the most of what is available. "The key to maintaining a tidy home is to put things away," says Helen, "but if you don't have a place for them to go, then it becomes very hard". Being attached to things is normal, but it becomes a problem if it's taking over whole rooms. "You might feel that you're dishonouring the person or memory you have associated with certain things, which is really important to address," Helen adds.

Likewise, Nicola is a great believer in making lists, crossing off clutter hotspots as and when you tackle them and focusing on what's important to you. She also follows a donate, keep, bin method when sorting stuff.

There's no fast and furious solution to decluttering. Small wins are what give you the incentive to continue (but not too small – Helen recommends a day, or at least a few hours, so you make a real impact, rather than just papering over the cracks).

5 STEPS TO A CLUTTER-FREE ROOM

START BY SETTING GOALS

A deadline like an event or overnight guest is useful. Being minimalist isn't about creating an empty room, it's about having space for what you need as well as great behind-the-scenes storage.

MAKE TIME

Put aside dedicated decluttering time and try not to get distracted. Choosing jobs you know you will complete in the timescale will give you that much-needed sense of achievement.

GET HELP

Whether you turn to a decluttering expert or family and friends, seeking help will give you someone to turn to when the going gets tough.

SHOPPING

Be a considered shopper in every area. Be strict with new purchases, ask for things you want as gifts and reinvent or upcycle old belongings.

SAY GOODBYE

Complete the journey and take things to the tip, charity shop or friends (check with them first). Making a pile in the garage doesn't count!

TRY Another WAY

Alternative therapies can help with **anxiety**. Here are some that you can **do, learn,** and buy **yourself**

Feeling anxious but don't want to wait for an appointment with the doctor or counsellor? If your anxiety is happening right now, why not go for some alternative remedies?

Alternative or complementary therapies are treatments and practices known for their healing effects, but which fall outside of conventional medicine. So that could be mindfulness, meditation, visualisation, massage and acupuncture, to name a few. You can also use music and art, essential oils, herbs and crystals. These and many other therapies, practices and products can help you with stress, negative thoughts, worry and other difficult emotions that can cause anxiety.

Some alternative therapies are based on mainstream science. Others on belief, tradition, mysticism and some on fringe science – science that isn't accepted as science by mainstream scientists. Alternative therapies can help you relax, feel positive, clear your mind and focus away from your problems. So if this sounds like it would be useful for you, let's take a look at what options there are.

WRITTEN BY: CRIS ANDREWS. IMAGES: GETTY

HEALING CRYSTALS

Crystals are minerals with atoms formed in a highly ordered, repeating pattern. These rocks are believed to possess helpful properties and have been used for therapeutic purposes for centuries.

The argument goes that crystals have a fixed energy pattern and unique energy field, which is what gives them special properties. It's believed that crystals work by affecting whatever is nearby, bringing balance and harmony to your own energy fields. This, in turn, helps you to stay calm. When our energies are unbalanced, so it's said, we're more likely to experience feelings of anxiety.

None of this is based on modern mainstream science. But people who use crystals say they have energies that help with different areas of life. Watch out for fake crystals made from glass, plastic or that have been synthetically produced, though. Real crystals have imperfections and are cool to touch. Fakes scratch easily.

Fluorite

Said to transform negative energy to positive. Will help you feel lighter and take life less seriously. Evokes a neutral state that can help you recognise your anxiety.

Tip *Keep it next to your bed so it can work on your mind while you sleep.*

Lepidolite

Contains lithium, a metallic element used in anti-anxiety medicine. Said to assist with breathing and release stress and worry by bringing you back to the present.

Tip *Another one to keep by your bed for it to work while you sleep.*

Amethyst

Violet or purple quartz. Said to bring mental clarity, so can help you understand the source of your anxiety and promote peace of mind. The ancient Greeks believed it could stop you getting drunk!

Tip *Place it on your forehead to relax your mind. Hold it in your hand for clarity and focus.*

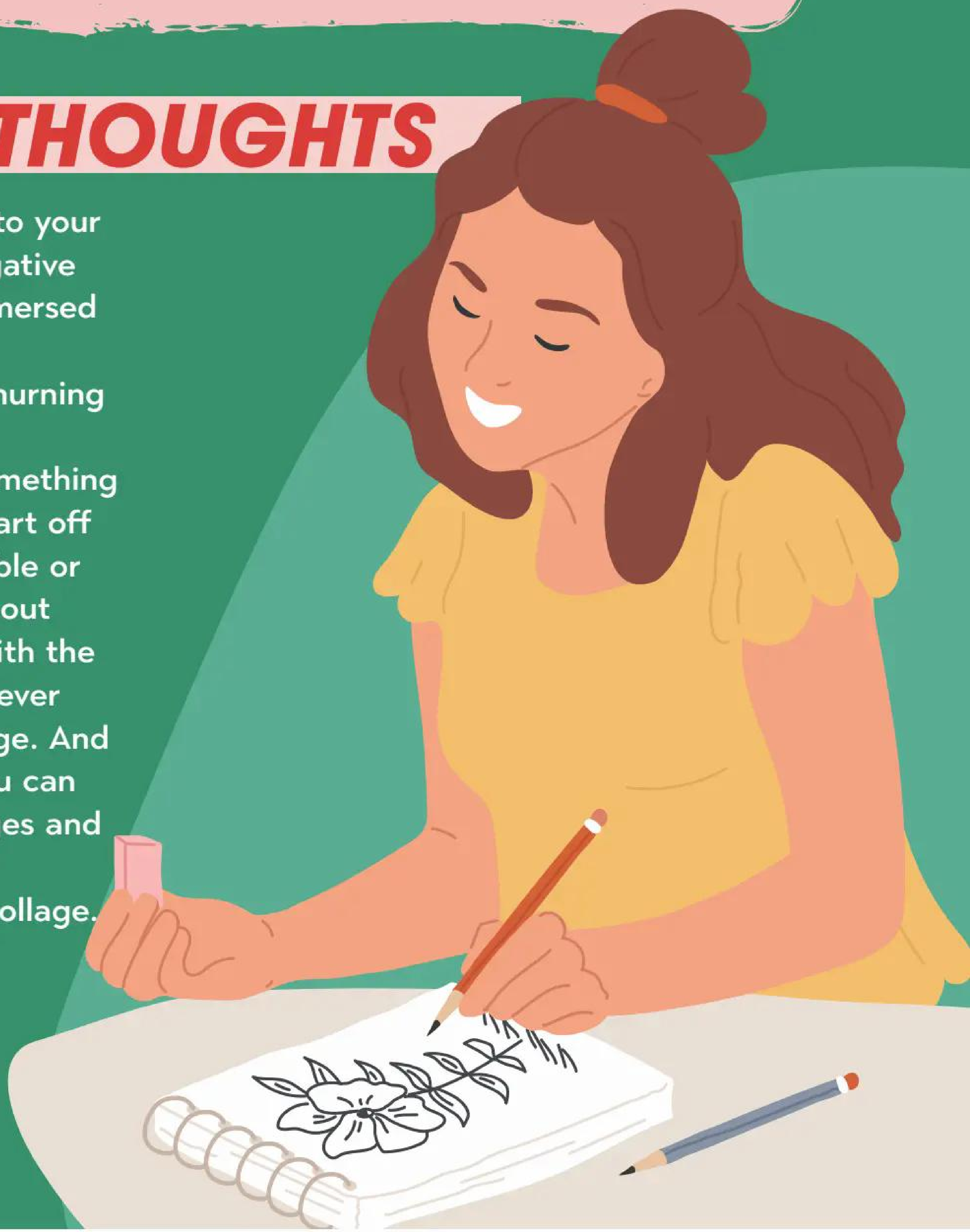
DRAW AWAY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Ever wondered why you sometimes start drawing without realising it when you feel a bit anxious? More likely a few scribbly doodles than a beautiful masterpiece.

It's because drawing is a great way of tuning into painful or difficult feelings. You can express how you feel without using words, get your mind away from uncontrollable anxious thoughts and focus on something that you actually can control.

When drawing like this, negative thoughts might pop in your mind. When they do, either scribble down something that represents the thought and then move on to your next thought, or let the negative thought just float away. Immersed in your own world like this, distressing thoughts stop churning around in your head.

You don't need to have something specific in mind to draw. Start off with a shape, a line, a scribble or a colour and don't worry about making mistakes. Just go with the flow of your mind and whatever needs to emerge, will emerge. And if you don't like to draw, you can always use clay, or cut images and shapes from magazines or coloured paper to make a collage.



TAKE IN A FEW SOUNDS

Upbeat music makes you feel optimistic and positive, we know that, right? But did you know that slower tempo music can help soothe or release stress?

Not that really mournful stuff where everyone is lamenting about how terrible life and the world is, around some slow melody. Forget all that stuff. Instead try Native American, Celtic, flute, ambient, light jazz, classical – even sounds of running water, rain and storms, or nature. There are so many different types of music for you to choose from, so try a few out and discover the particular style that feels right for you. Instrumentals are more useful than the songs with lyrics or repetitive, catchy rhythms and melodies.

Listening to music helps with anxiety because it can lower your heart rate, reduce cortisol levels (the chemical we produce when we're stressed) and release endorphins (chemicals in the brain) that improve our sense of wellbeing. It can also help you fall asleep easier.

> "Slower tempo music can help release stress"

CHILL OUT WITH CBD

CBD oil comes from marijuana (and hemp) but does not include THC, the psychoactive part of the plant that gets people high, intoxicated and addicted. It is perfectly legal in many countries, but there may be age restrictions. It is advised that teenagers wishing to try CBD oil first consult their doctor.

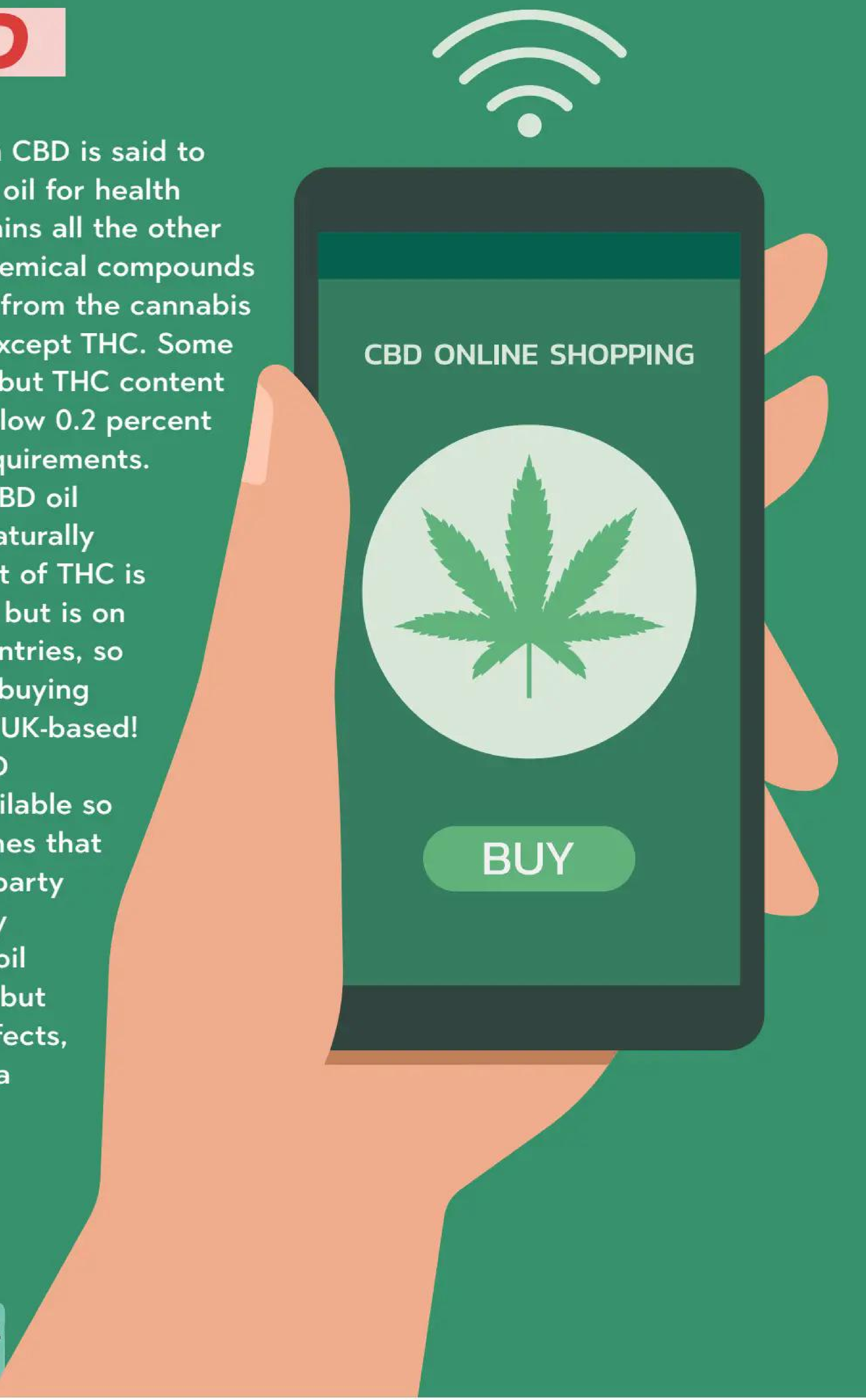
It's made by extracting cannabidiol (CBD) from the plant and mixing it with an oil like hemp or coconut. Research has shown that CBD oil can help with anxiety, but there's no definitive research as to why this is so, although some experts suggest it could be something to do with how CBD relaxes the chemicals in our brains that regulate anxiety.

You can get CBD in supplements, drinks, snacks, sprays, bath soaks, and as an oil that to put in drinks, food or directly on to your tongue. Taking it as a regular supplement seems to have maximum effect.

Broad-spectrum CBD is said to be the best CBD oil for health benefits. It contains all the other cannabinoids (chemical compounds inside the plant) from the cannabis or hemp plant, except THC. Some do contain THC, but THC content has to remain below 0.2 percent to meet legal requirements.

Full-spectrum CBD oil containing the naturally occurring amount of THC is illegal in the UK, but is on sale in other countries, so be careful when buying online if you are UK-based!

Low-quality CBD products are available so always choose ones that have been third-party tested for quality and purity. CBD oil is generally safe but can have side effects, such as diarrhoea and fatigue.



HERBAL BALANCE

People have been using herbs to treat illness for as long as there have been people. These herbs are called adaptogens and they interact with the processes within our bodies that balance hormones when we're stressed. The theory goes that adaptogens help us cope with challenging experiences better and for longer, as well as keeping our bodies balanced.

In many parts of the world herbs have always been an important part of medical care, particularly China and India. In the UK, herbs are growing in popularity and are available in shops, markets and online. You can get them in capsules, teas, liquid drops, skin creams, as powder, or in dried plant extract.

Not all herbs are adaptogens. All adaptogens are non-toxic when taken in low doses.

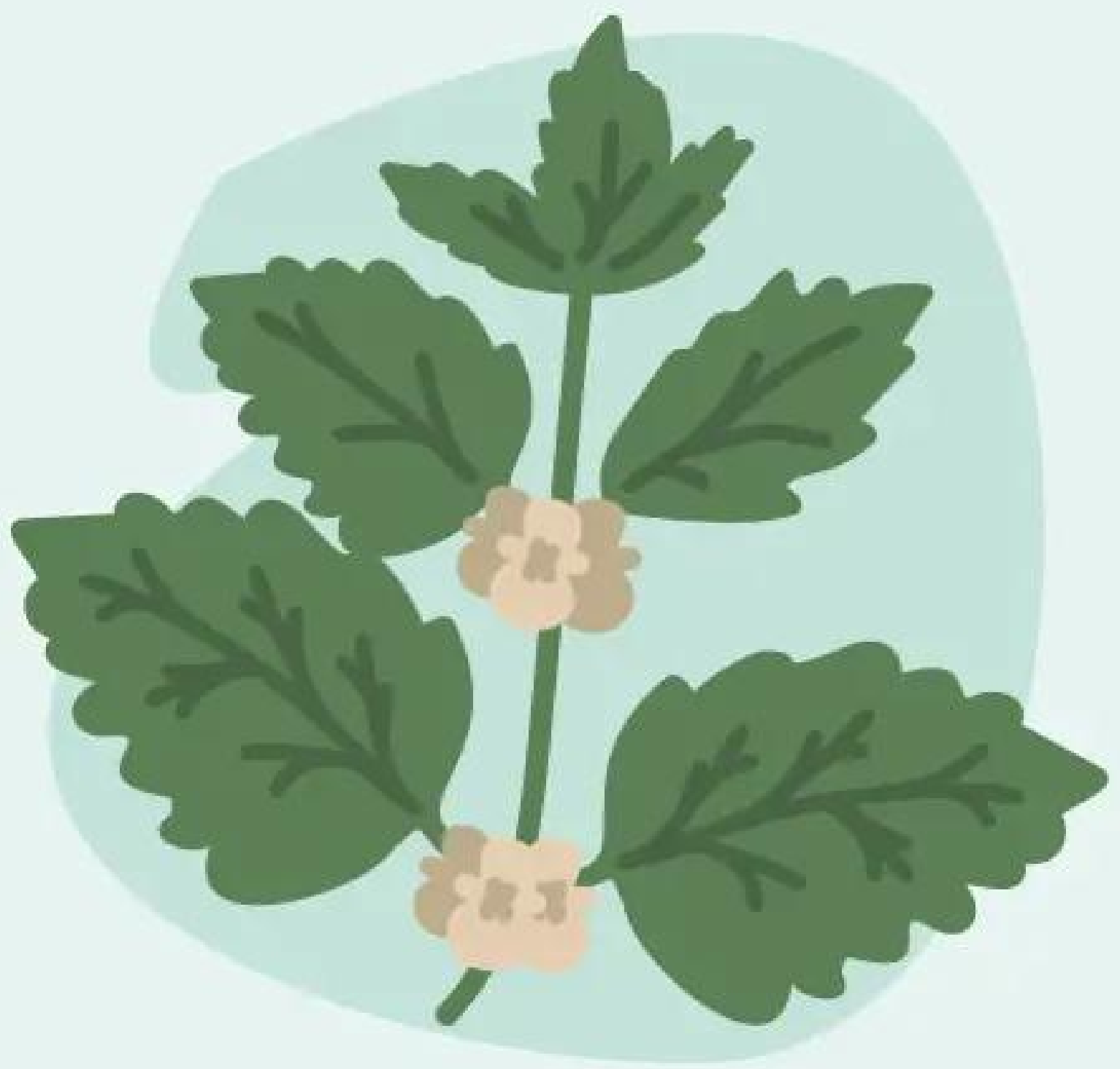
Useful herbs

Tackle stress and anxiety by ingesting these helpful herbs

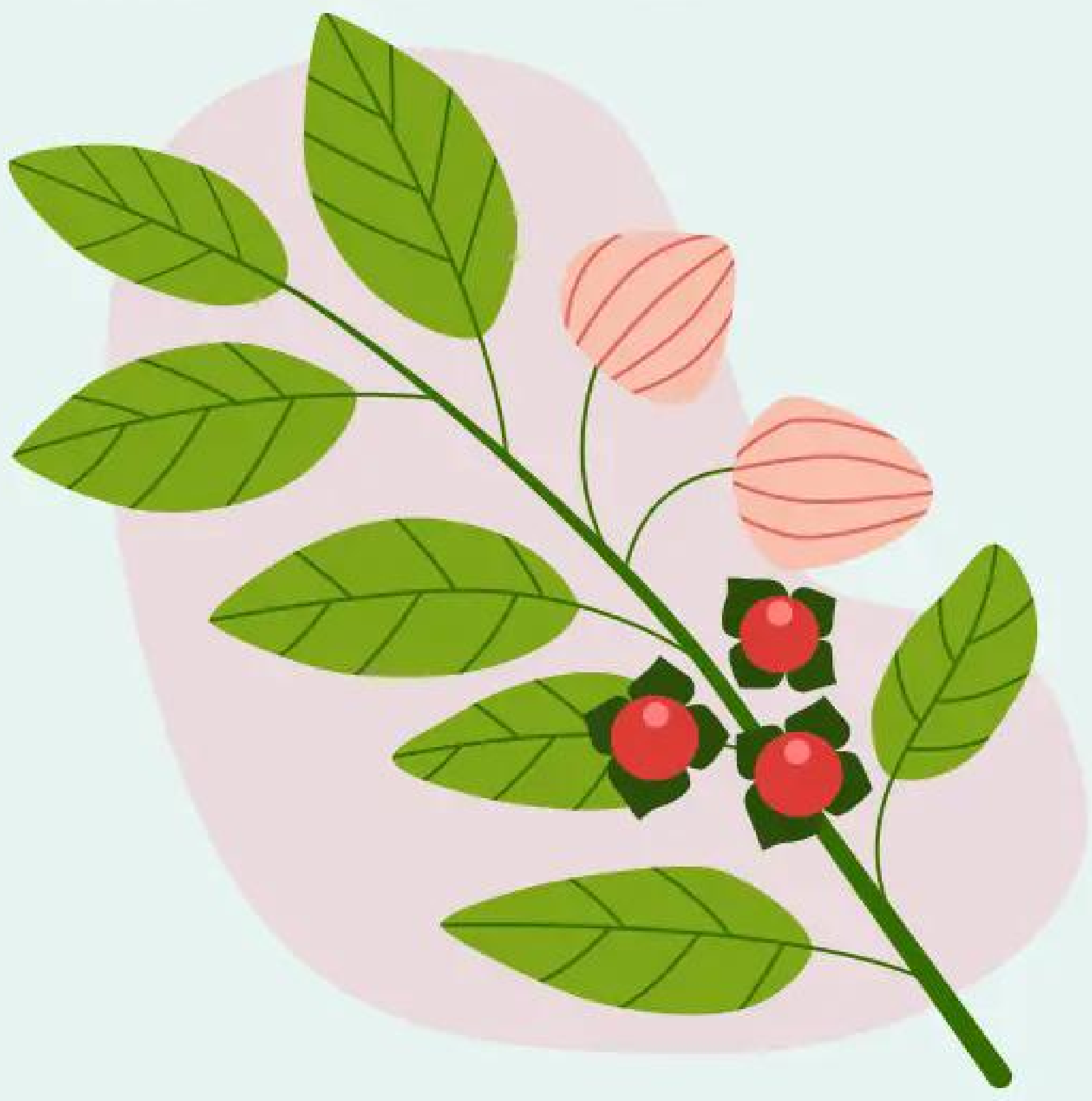
Lemon balm

As part of the mint family, lemon balm is excellent for stomach complaints, but it also helps uplift your mood, works on the central nervous system to calm anxiety and improves cognitive function – helpful during exam times!

Tip *Add dried lemon balm to boiling water for a soothing sip, or find it in supplements and tea blends.*



Ashwagandha



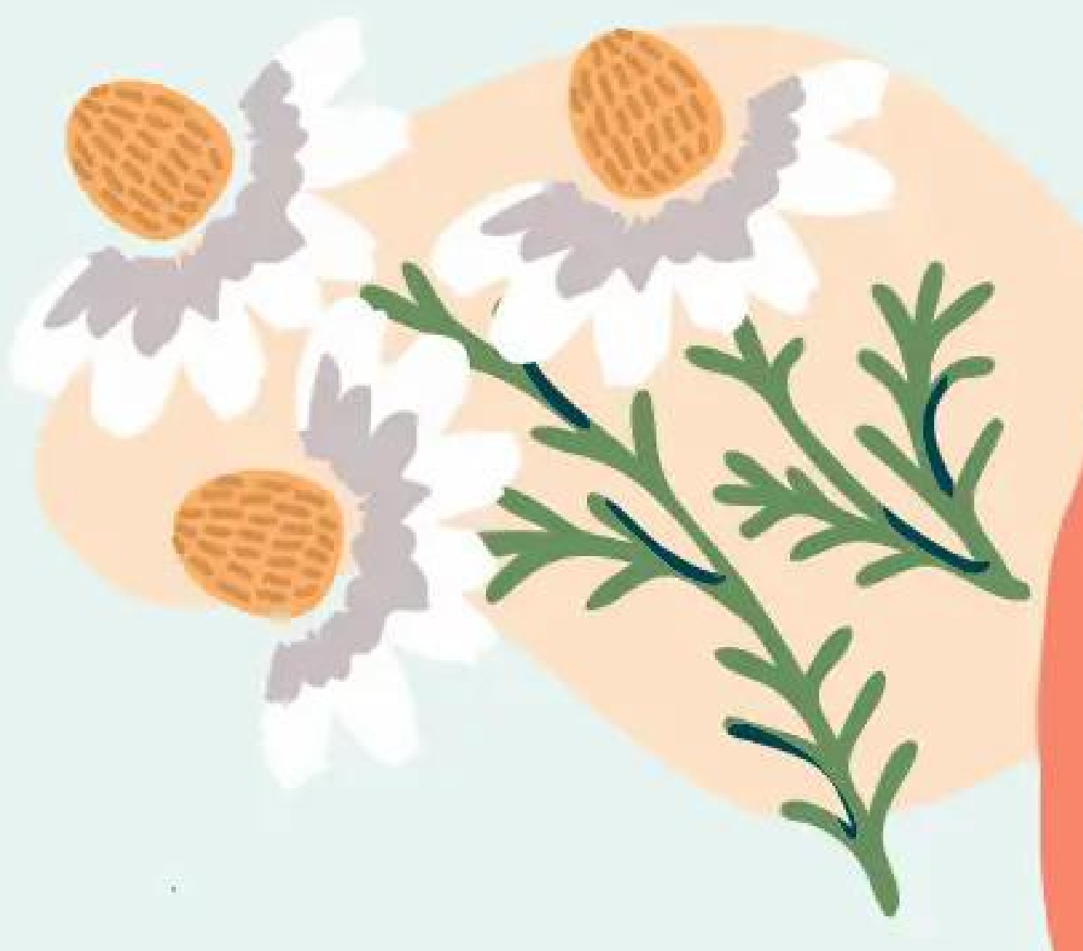
This evergreen shrub has been used for over 5,000 years in India for its therapeutic value. It can reduce cortisol (stress hormone) levels in the blood and reduce irritability and stress-related cravings.

Tip *Add a cup of ashwagandha in powder form to a homemade smoothie, available in most health food stores.*

Chamomile

Chamomile has been used since ancient times to treat nausea, tummy complaints and help calm the mind and induce sleep.

Tip *Dried chamomile can be added to boiling water to create a soothing tea (try a mix with lemon balm!).*



AROMATHERAPY – AN ANCIENT ART FOR ANXIETY

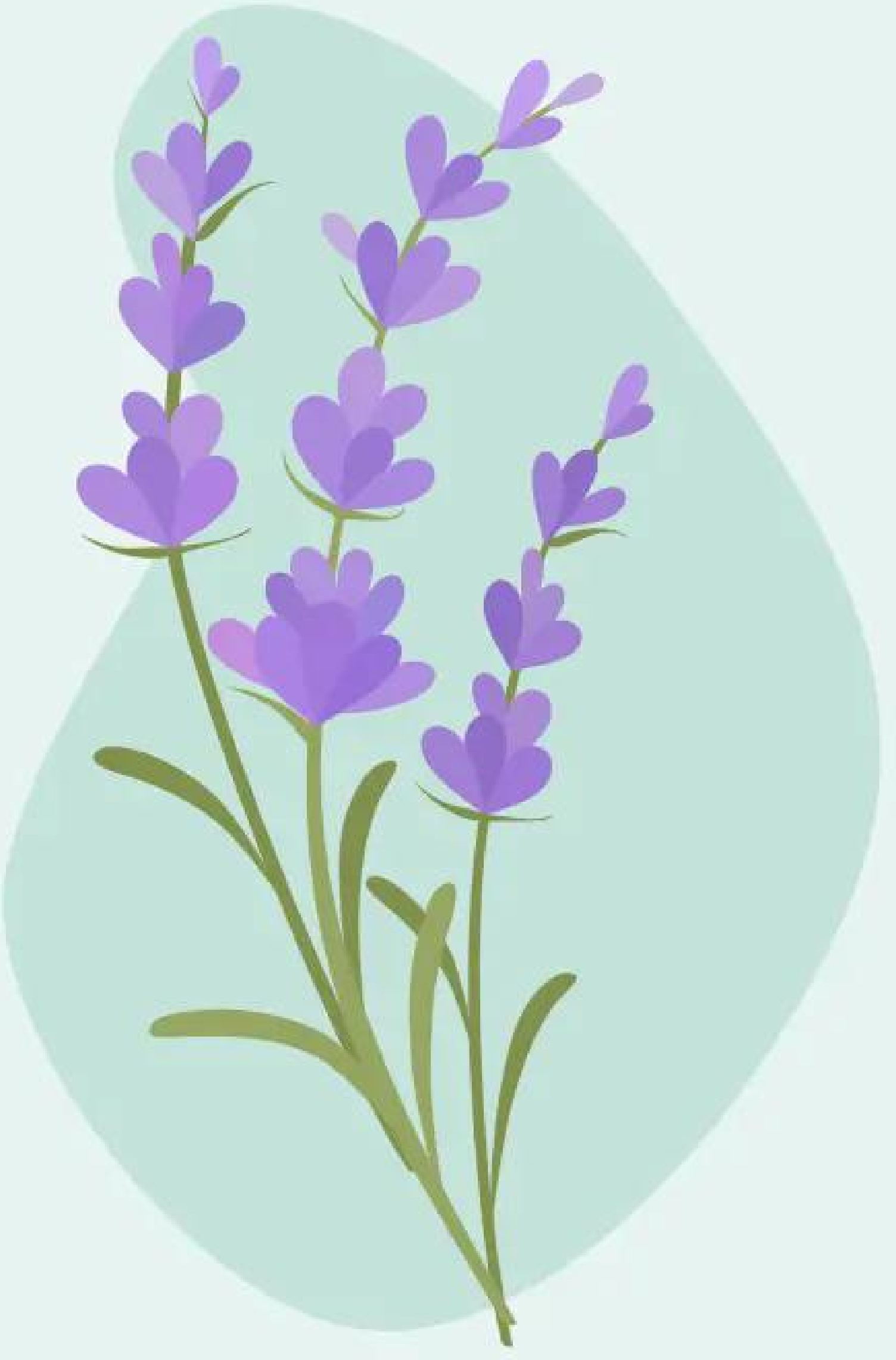
Aromatherapy is based on the therapeutic use of aromatic plants, a practice used since the beginning of human civilisation.

According to many ancient texts, perfumes, oils and ointments have been used in rituals, to cure diseases and to help people get what they want – whether that's money, health, or happiness.

You might have already used plant oils when you had a cold, in the form of Vicks VapoRub, but these powerful oils can aid the mind as much as the physical body. To reap the rewards of plant power, plant oils – which are called essential oils – can be inhaled or applied to the skin. You can buy handy devices such as electric diffusers, use a candle and burner (but be careful with these, and always use under adult supervision), or simply add to hot water and breathe in, just like you do when you are sick. Essential oils can also be applied to clothing or rubbed into the skin (always mixing with a carrier oil like olive, jojoba, coconut oil or a scentless balm such as Vaseline) but should never be sipped or swallowed.

Essential oils

Breathe in these calming smells whenever you feel anxious



Lavender

Works on the brain to reduce the fight-or-flight stress response.
How to use Try diluted and applied to your pulse points, in a pillow spray or add essential oil to a warm bath.
Cautions Can cause nausea and should be used dilute on skin.

Jasmine

Calms the nervous system without causing sleepiness. Makes you feel more positive and energetic.
How to use Add to a plain carrier oil (such as grapeseed, jojoba or almond) and massage into your skin.
Cautions Can cause allergic reactions on the skin, never apply directly!

Sweet orange

Soothes nervous system, reduces pulse rate and promotes healthy lymphatic flow.
How to use Use in a diffuser or add to a warm bath to instantly boost your mood!
Cautions Can cause burns on the skin when exposed to sunlight, so use SPF if you add to your bath. Can irritate your nose and throat if inhaled directly from a bottle or swallowed. Always apply to skin diluted.

RELEASE THE PRESSURE

Physical touch is healing. It calms our central nervous system and slows our heartbeat. This could be a simple hug from a friend, a gentle hand squeeze from a family member or a more elaborate form of touch healing, such as massage, reflexology or acupuncture.

Massage stimulates parts of the brain that regulate emotions and stress response. It also reduces levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, and stimulates our parasympathetic nervous system to keep us in the rest and digest state, rather than fight or flight.

Reflexology is a system of massage based on the theory that there are reflex points on the feet, hands, and head linked to every part of the body. The foot contains up to 7,000 nerves, each one corresponding to a different gland organ or muscle in the body. If the body is out of balance, problems can occur.

Acupuncture is an ancient practice where needles are inserted into pressure points on the body. In traditional Chinese medicine, these points stimulate blocked or interrupted qi (vital life energy) and promote healing. In the West, acupuncture is believed to stimulate the nervous system.

For all of these treatments you'd need a qualified therapist. But, you can feel some benefit if you stimulate the pressure points yourself.

There's a point between your eyebrows, another in the upper shell of your ear, in the hollow part on the inner lobe and two more on each foot just below the join of your big toe and second toe, above the bone in the hollow part. All these are said to help with anxiety.

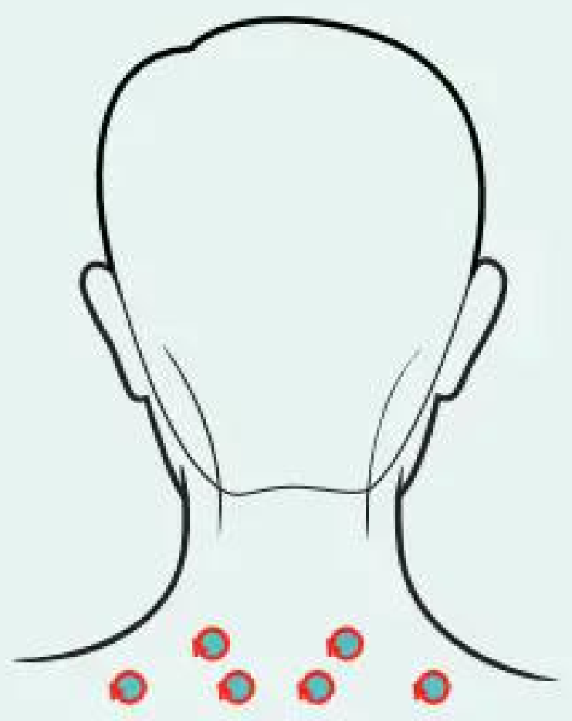
To stimulate these points, run your finger along the area of your body until you find the point.

On the feet, apply firm, deep pressure to the point, either using your thumb, finger or knuckle. Keep this pressure applied for four to five seconds.

With the ear point, apply firm, gentle pressure in a circular motion for two minutes. Do the same for the eyebrow point, but for five to ten minutes.

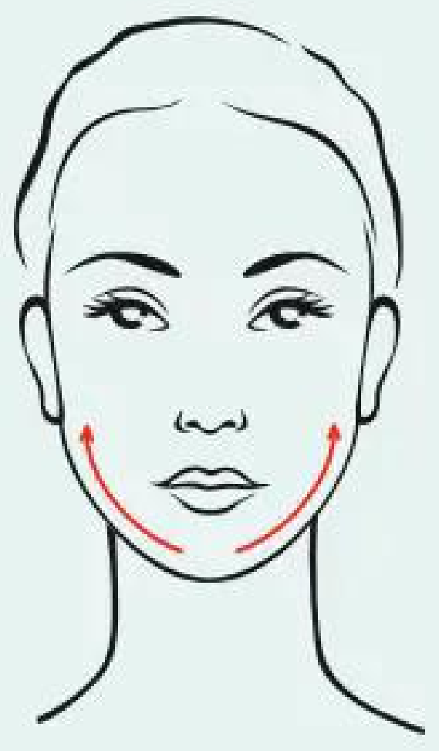
Facial massage techniques for anxiety

Massage is an excellent relaxation tool and you can gain a lot of calm from a simple facial massage. Repeat all of these for some stress and tension relief, to centre your mind and help lessen headaches and neck pains



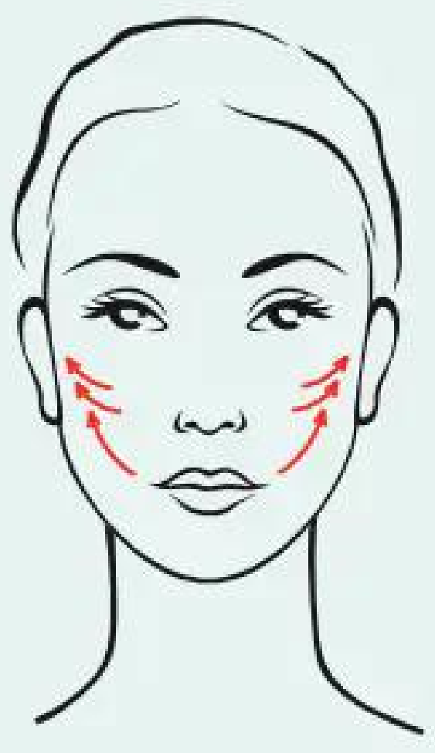
Neck and shoulders

An overall reliever, reach back to massage the base of your neck and shoulders in circular motions. Tip: some oil or moisturiser may make this more comfortable.



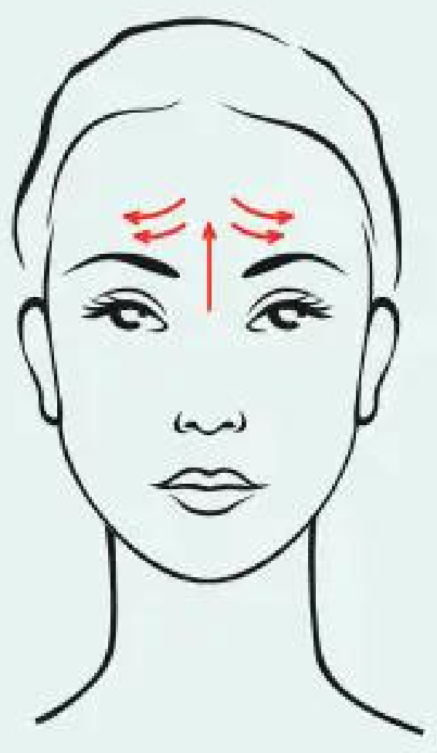
Jaw release

Starting from the chin, push both hands upwards along your jawline to your ear, then bring them down the sides of your neck. Use the most comfortable pressure.



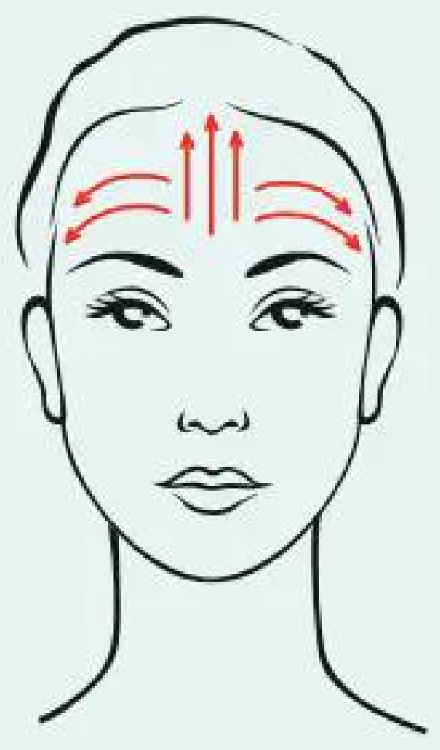
Tapping

Tapping has been clinically proven to lower stress hormones. Using the tips of your fingers, start at your cheek bones and gently tap outwards to your ears.



Brow squeeze

This is a nice little stress reliever – start at the bridge of your nose and gently press your eyebrows between thumb and forefinger, working towards the ears.



Forehead sweep

Using the tips of your fingers, start applying pressure at the bridge of your nose and gently run upwards, over your forehead and into your hairline, one hand after the other.

Thoughtful techniques

Mindfulness and meditation are two excellent ways to keep your anxiety at bay

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is all about taking the time to bring awareness to the present moment, to make a deliberate effort to notice what is going on and to focus on your mind, your body and on your surroundings, shutting everything else out. In this state, you take your attention away from past problems and worries about the future. You notice how thoughts come into your mind and how to let go of them and see patterns that are not helpful.

As a result, you'll have more choice over how to respond to thoughts and feelings and better cope with unhelpful thoughts.

MEDITATION

You might think that meditation is about clearing your mind entirely and being able to reach a trance-like state free from thoughts like a Tibetan monk. But that is an unachievable goal for the majority of us! Meditation isn't about emptying your mind, it's about taking control and letting go of your thoughts – that's a big difference!

"Meditation is the training ground for learning mindfulness," explains leading meditation app, Headspace. Meditation exercises enable you to practise being fully aware of the present moment in a controlled setting. In the same way that you can strengthen your body by regularly doing push-ups, you strengthen your ability to be mindful through meditation.

Like meditation, breathing exercises can help you become more mindful. While we breathe all the time, intentional breathing allows you to connect with your body, which automatically brings you out of a distracted mind. Over time, breathing techniques also improve your focus by regulating certain chemicals in your brain. A more focused brain allows us to be more present.

Tranquil tips

1. Try to practise in the morning, when you are most at peace, but before bed works too!
2. Start small, set a timer for five to ten minutes.
3. Find a quiet place where you aren't likely to be bothered by anyone else, perhaps outside on a nice day in the park, or simply in your bedroom.

Getting started

Breathing exercises

The simple action of taking deep, controlled breaths delivers more oxygen to the brain and calms the heart rate. Try the 4-7-8 method: fully exhale, then breathe in through your nose for the count of four, hold it for seven, exhale through your mouth for a count of eight, and then repeat.

Visualisation

You need to practise this technique, but it can be really effective. It's all about using your imagination to relax and take you elsewhere for a little bit, so that you're no longer in your anxious state. Think of somewhere calm and enjoyable and then slowly imagine how it feels to all of your senses.

The body scan method

Find a comfortable seated position, sit tall and set a timer for the duration you want to meditate for. Close your eyes and focus your mind on your body. Starting at the top of your head, slowly move your attention down through each part of your body. Notice sensations in your scalp, forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, jaw, throat, neck, shoulders, upper back, chest, arms, torso, top of the legs, thighs, knees, calves, feet, toes. You don't need to change anything, simply notice what is there.

> "Breathing exercises can help you to become more mindful"

Walk away your worries

When you are walking, bring your awareness to the contact between your feet and the ground. Walk with ease instead of rushing. Notice every step. Relax any tension in your shoulders or arms. Synchronise your steps with your breathing. Depending on the natural rhythms of your breath and the pace of your steps, you might take two or three steps while you inhale, and three or four steps as you exhale. Listen to the sounds around you and look at your surroundings – not evaluating them, but observing with your senses.

Mindfulness meditation

Find a comfortable seated position, sit tall and set a timer for the duration you want to meditate for. Close your eyes and breathe naturally. You are not controlling your breath, but simply staying aware of each breath. Focus your mind on the physical sensation of your breath flowing in through your nose, down your throat, into your lungs, and back out again. Counting each breath in and out can be helpful. Whenever you realise you have lost your focus on the breath, all you have to do is come back to noticing your next breath. Continue until the timer goes off.

Night, night Sleep tight

Is anxiety making you **struggle to drift off** at night, or are you always **waking up in the early hours?** Use this guide to ensure that you get the very best rest for your health and wellbeing

© Getty

SLEEP MYTHS BUSTED

COUNTING SHEEP CAN HELP YOU FALL ASLEEP, BUT SO CAN COUNTING COWS OR DOGS. IT'S THE REPETITIVE NATURE OF THE TASK THAT MAKES YOU FEEL SLEEPY. ABSORPTION IN A MENTAL TASK IS AN ASPECT OF MINDFULNESS AND CAN HELP TO RELAX YOU.

Just one more episode of the latest Netflix series won't hurt, will it? You know it's late, but there are no ads, so you'll be tucked up by oh, at least midnight. But deep down, you know that this nightly binging on box sets is having a major impact on your sleep.

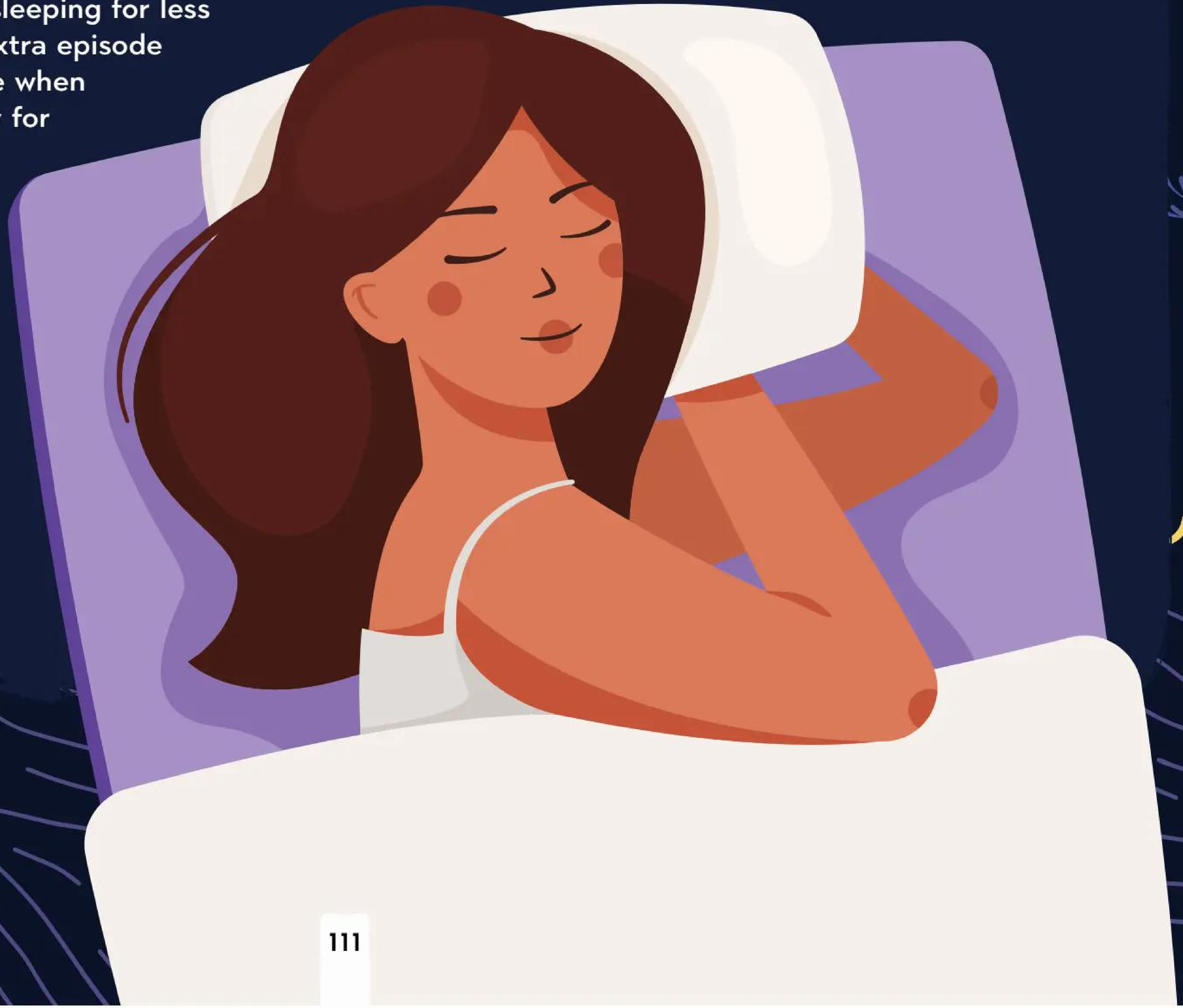
A survey by The Sleep Council (**sleepcouncil.org.uk**), found that while most adults need around seven to eight hours of sleep a night, a third of Brits are getting just five to six. And teens need even more, especially when they are going through puberty. According to the Sleep Foundation, teens need eight to ten hours of sleep a night for their health and wellbeing. But its not just you squeezing in one more episode of *Rick and Morty* before hitting the hay – teens naturally have a tendency to stay up late due to their changing biological clocks.

A growing body of research suggests that mental and physical problems become more pronounced in those sleeping for less than six hours. That extra episode delaying your bedtime when your alarm is set early for school could amp up the fight-or-flight response to stress level, releasing hormones that speed up your heart rate, raise blood pressure and trigger anxiety. "It's important to remember," says Lisa Artis from The Sleep Council, "it's also about the quality of sleep you are getting, not the quantity. If you are sleepy, exhausted and unable to function, then chances are you are not sleeping very well."

HEALTHY HABITS

Teenage activities such as socialising, extracurriculars, homework and exams can all cause racing thoughts and make it hard to switch off and get enough shut-eye, causing an endless cycle of stress and anxiety.

"If there's something playing on your mind, write it down," says Lisa, "whether that's worries or even a to-do list." Tech should be avoided before bed – in particular the hour before it. "The blue light that emits from devices messes around with your body's circadian rhythms by suppressing the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin in the brain, which is what we need in order to feel sleepy," explains Lisa. "Bedrooms should be kept for



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> “Set your alarm for when you have to get up as you won’t get quality zzzzs in between snoozes”

sleep only,” says Dave Gibson, a health care practitioner, who specialises in helping those with sleep problems (**thesleepsite.co.uk**). “This is so the brain associates this room with getting to sleep. Smartphones and tablets should, as much as possible, be kept out. Try using a dawn simulator, which is a great way to wake up. Even if you do use your phone, avoid hitting the snooze button as it confuses the brain over when it’s time to wake up. Just get out of bed and open the curtains to let in the daylight.”

CONSIDER YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Your sleep environment is very important when it comes to getting the best night’s sleep. Aim for something that is neither too hot or too cold, and as quiet and dark as possible. “Your bed needs to be comfortable,” says Lisa. “It’s difficult to get deep, restful sleep on one that’s too hard, too soft, too small or too old.” The Sleep Council recommends changing your mattress every seven years, with research showing that swapping an uncomfortable one for a new one resulted in nearly an hour of extra sleep a night... just imagine what that's like for a second!

Likewise, if you suffer with back and shoulder pain, look to your pillow. “A good pillow should hold your head in the correct alignment, in the same relation to your shoulders and spine as if you were standing upright with the correct posture,” says Lisa. “Replace a pillow once it has lost its ‘loft’ (height), or it has become lumpy or discoloured.” Dave adds that linens should be clean, cool and crisp, and ideally cotton, which helps skin to breathe, plus bedlinens should be changed once a week because we lose half a pint or more of fluid each night (yes, really).

MAKE A ROUTINE

It’s not only children who benefit from a bedtime routine. Lisa advises finding ways of relaxing, such as a warm bath with soothing scents, background music, gentle stretches and yoga. “It’s also important to establish a regular sleep pattern – going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time each day. Your body and mind will feel much better for it,” she says. “Our brains like repetition,” adds Dave, “a consistent sleep routine helps support and strengthen our body clocks.”

So you have your own bedtime routine – you’re weaning yourself off more than one Netflix episode after 10pm; your bed is looking super-inviting; and you’ve cut back on caffeine and other bad-sleep foods (incidentally, there’s no

SLEEP MYTHS BUSTED

YAWNING ISN’T ALWAYS A SIGN YOU’RE TIRED. SOMETIMES WE YAWN WHEN WE WAKE UP, WE’RE BORED OR SOMEONE ELSE DOES.

evidence that cheese causes nightmares – it's actually a good bedtime snack thanks to the calcium, which is an amino acid the body uses to produce melatonin, the sleepy hormone, says the Sleep Council).

But what if the other members of your household aren't quite on the same sleep-promotion page? If another family member has an almighty snore, what starts as a niggle, can become a major issue. "It's important to get it sorted," says Lisa, who recommends the British Snoring & Sleep Apnoea website (**britishsnoring.co.uk**) if earplugs aren't doing the trick. If you follow Lisa and Dave's advice, improved sleep can come to us all (hopefully), but after it does, just don't be tempted to hit that snooze button.

Set your alarm for when you actually have to get up as you won't get any quality zzzzs in between snoozes. Lisa even advises putting the alarm clock on the other side of the room, especially if you have a hard time not pressing the snooze button each day. "You'll have to walk across the room to turn it off, waking yourself up along the way," says Lisa. Then you'll be ready to start the day, as fresh as a daisy!

Herbal HELPERS

Try these herbs as tinctures to aid a peaceful night's sleep

VALERIAN ROOT

Look out for herbal teas and supplements that contain valerian (Valeriana officinalis), a natural sedative used to treat insomnia and heart palpitations. Valerian is often found in herbal teas designed for bedtime and can also be taken in a herbal tablet form to induce a peaceful snooze.

PASSION FLOWER

Another ingredient to look out for in natural remedies and teas is passion flower (Passiflora incarnata), which is commonly used as a remedy for both anxiety and insomnia. Mixed with lavender or camomile, it makes for a pleasant and calming tincture to unwind before bed.

HOPS

Often mixed with valerian root, hops (Humulus lupulus) are what give beer its distinct flavour – and probably why your older sibling hits the hay straight after a trip to the pub! A calming sleep aid, dried hops can be used in teas, but can be bitter to taste, so add some lemon balm and honey.

5 steps to SLEEP like a baby...

New bed

Replace your mattress every seven years as advised by the Sleep Council. Test it before you buy (or take advantage of a no-quibbles return if buying online). Check your pillow still has its plumpness, too.

Routine

Start a bedtime routine. This could include a bath, stretches or reading a book.

Read

If you've been trying to get to sleep for more than 20 minutes, get out of bed and read a book under dim light until you feel sleepy, says Dave Gibson (**thesleepsite.co.uk**).

Keep cool

Get your sleep environment right. The ideal temperature is around 16˚C. Try to keep your room as dark as possible.

No tech

Ditch the tech and avoid checking emails last thing at night or first thing in the morning. Swap your phone for an alarm clock.

Three of the best apps

Calm

(£7.99/$14.99 a month) for a year, **calm.com/sleep)** Famous voices, including Joanna Lumley, Leona Lewis, Matthew McConaughey and Stephen Fry, narrate calming tales to help you nod off.

Headspace

(from £9.99/ $12.99 a month, App Store and GooglePlay) Contains meditation guides to help lower your heart rate and slow down your breathing for a better night's rest.

Sleepio

(Free, sleepio. com/nhs) Employs techniques from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help users sleep.

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INHALE
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Anti-anxiety for TEENS

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Anti-anxiety
for TEENS

TAKE CONTROL AND WAVE GOODBYE TO YOUR WORRIES

Most of us experience anxiety from time to time, and it can be a useful reaction to kick-start motivation, keep us on track to achieve our goals or warn us when something isn't right. However, during the tumultuous teenage years it can easily go unchecked. Worries fly at you from every direction, from self-consciousness sparked by bodily changes to pressure over school grades and the future, it's easy to see why so many teens struggle. If you feel like there isn't a day that goes by without feeling butterflies in your tummy, this book is here to help lift the weight off your back and teach you how normal you really are. Discover an arsenal of antidotes to arm you with healthy coping mechanisms that will change your life.

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